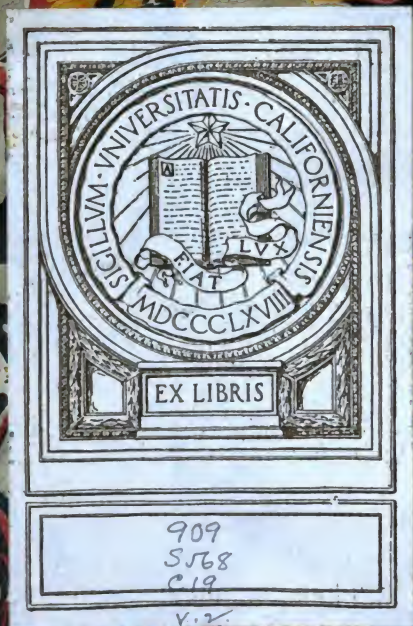


LIFE OF MRS. SIDDONS

Thomas Campbell





909
S768
C19

Y.2.



LIFE
OF
MRS. SIDDONS.

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA
L I F E

OF

MRS. SIDDONS.

BY THOMAS CAMPBELL.

"Pity it is that the momentary beauties flowing from a harmonious elocution cannot, like those of poetry, be their own record;—that the animated graces of the Player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion that represent them; or at least can but faintly glimmer through the memory and imperfect attestation of a few surviving spectators."

CIBBER.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

EFFINGHAM WILSON, ROYAL EXCHANGE.

1834.

TO THE
ADVERTISING

J. AND C. ADLARD, PRINTERS,
Bartholomew Close.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

Mrs. Siddons acts <i>Lady Macbeth</i> —Her own Remarks on the Character.	Page 3—49
--	-----------

CHAPTER II.

Observations on Mrs. Siddons's Estimate of <i>Lady Macbeth's</i> Character, and on that given by Mrs. Jameson, in her "Characteristics of Women."	P. 43—56
---	----------

CHAPTER III.

Continuation of the Season at Drury Lane—Mrs. Siddons plays <i>Desdemona</i> , Mason's <i>Elfrida</i> , and <i>Rosalind</i> , in "As You Like It"—Mrs. Siddons in Scotland—Season 1785-6—She appears in the "Jubilee"—in Jephson's "Braganza"—as <i>Mrs. Lovemore</i> , in Murphy's Comedy of "The Way to Keep Him"—as <i>Hermione</i> , in "The Distressed Mother"—as <i>Ophelia</i>	59—90
---	-------

CHAPTER IV.

Season at Drury Lane, 1786-7—Mrs. Siddons plays *Cleone*—*Imogen*—*Hortensia*, in “The Count of Narbonne”—*Lady Restless*, in the Comedy of “All in the Wrong”—*Julia*, in the “Italian Lover”—*Alicia*, in “Jane Shore.”
P. 93—114

CHAPTER V.

Season at Drury Lane, 1787-8—Mrs. Siddons appears as *Cordelia*, in “King Lear”—as *Cleonice*, in the “Fate of Sparta”—as *Katherine*, in “Katherine and Petruchio”—as *Dionara*, in Greatheed’s “Regent”—as *Cleopatra*, in Dryden’s “All for Love”—Visits Scotland—Was at Windsor when the King shewed the first Symptoms of his mental Malady.
117—130

CHAPTER VI.

Season 1788-9—Mrs. Siddons’s Health becomes infirm—She meets with a domestic Calamity—“Henry VIII.” is brought out at Drury Lane—her *Queen Katharine*—She plays *Volumnia*, in the Tragedy of “Coriolanus,” the *Princess*, in Jephson’s “Lombardy,” and Shakespeare’s *Juliet*.
133—160

CHAPTER VII.

Mrs. Siddons retires for a Season, but returns after the lapse of a Year—Plays *Queen Elizabeth*, in “Richard the Third,” and *Mrs. Oakley*, in “The Jealous Wife.” P. 163—176

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mr. Taylor, on his offer to write her Biography—Re-opening of Drury Lane—An Innovation in the acting of “Macbeth”—She acts the *Countess Orsina*, in Lessing's Tragedy of “*Emilia Galotti*”—*Horatia*, in Whitehead's “*Roman Father*”—*Elvira*, in Miss Burney's unfortunate Drama—*Palmira*, in “*Mahomet*”—*Emmeline*, in “*Edgar and Evelina*”—*Roxana*, in “*Alexander the Great*”—*Julia*, in Prince Hoare's Tragedy of “*Such Things Were*”—*Almeyda*, in “*The Queen of Grenada*”—Escapes acting in “*Vortigern*”—She is disappointed in *Money Matters* by Sheridan; but returns to Drury Lane, in September, 1796—Takes a new Character, in Thomson's “*Edward and Eleonora*”—Acts *Vitellia*, in Jephson's “*Conspiracy*”—*Millwood*, in “*George Barnwell*”—*Athenais*, in “*Theodosius, or the Force of Love*”—*Agnes*, in “*Fatal Curiosity*.” P. 179—214

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Siddons performs *Mrs. Haller*, in "The Stranger—Loses her Daughter Maria—Plays *Miranda*, in a Piece by Mr. Boaden; and the *Countess*, in Dr. Whalley's "Castle of Montval"—Two Letters of Miss Seward. P. 217—241

CHAPTER X.

She performs in Sheridan's "Pizarro"—In "Adelaide," a Tragedy by Pye—*Lady Jane*, in Joanna Baillie's "De Montford"—In Godwin's "Antonio"—In Sotheby's "Julian and Agnes"—In "The Winter's Tale"—Her danger from Fire in the Statue Scene—Visits Wales, on her way to Ireland. . . . P. 245—271

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Siddons goes to Ireland with melancholy Presentiments—She visits Conway Castle, in Wales—Fulfil's her Engagement at Dublin, and accepts one at Cork—Becomes alarmed by the News of her Daughter Sally's Illness—Quits her Engagement at Cork—Returns to England, and finds her Daughter dead—Acts in the Winter at Covent Garden again—Is severely afflicted in her Health—The Popularity of the Boy Betty. . . . P. 275—305

CHAPTER XII.

Mrs. Siddons removes her Abode to Westbourne—Mr. Siddons's Verses on the same—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to her Son Henry, from Broadstairs—Characters she played in 1806-7, at Covent Garden—Mr. Siddons's Death—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mrs. Piozzi on that subject—The Burning of Covent Garden Theatre—Rebuilding of the House, and the O. P. Riots—Letter to Mrs. Siddons from Mr. Jekyll—Another from Hannah More—Mrs. Siddons takes her Farewell of the Stage. . . . P. 309—340

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Siddons reads to the Royal Family at Windsor—Has her Likeness taken by the Painter Harlowe—Her Readings at the Argyle Rooms—Visits by Invitation the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge—Her Tour to Paris—She visits the Louvre—Death of her Son Henry—Acts at Edinburgh for the benefit of his surviving Family—Re-appears on the Stage, by command of the Princess Charlotte—Her last Performance, for the benefit of Mr. Charles Kemble—Joins her Brother John, at Lausanne—Mrs. Garrick's Bequest to her—Mrs. Siddons's gratification at Fanny Kemble's Performance—Her last Illness, Death, and Funeral—General Eulogium on her Character. . . . P. 343—394

CHAPTER I.

VOL. II.

B

CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons acts *Lady Macbeth*—Her own Remarks
on the Character.

L I F E
OF
MRS. SIDDONS.

CHAPTER I.

No performer was destined oftener than Mrs. Siddons to expend superlative genius on the acting of indifferent dramas. It is true that she sometimes turned this misfortune into the means of creating additional astonishment. Where there was little or no poetry, she made it for herself; and might be said to have become at once both the dramatist and the actress. Where but a hint of a fine situation was given, she caught up the vague conception, and produced it in a shape that was at once ample and defined; and, with the sorriest text to justify the outpouring of her own

radiant and fervid spirit, she turned into a glowing picture what she had found but a comparative blank.

Much, however, as we may wonder at this high degree of theatrical art, I doubt if its practice would be desirable, as a general advantage either to the actor's profession or to dramatic poetry. Actors, in parts beneath their powers, are, after all, only like musicians performing on instruments unworthy of their skill. They overcome us, it is true, with wonder and delight. I have heard the inspired Neukomme draw magical sounds from a common parish-church organ, which, under any other touch than his own, was about as musical as the bell overhead that summoned the parishioners. But this did not prevent me from devoutly wishing that I had heard him perform on the Haarlem organ.

The stage-artist's inspiration ought never to

depend on shining by its own light: for it never can be perfect, unless it meets and kindles with the correspondent inspiration of poetry. The temporary triumph which this marvellous acting affords to indifferent plays is unjust to the truly poetical drama, and perplexing to popular taste. Mrs. Siddons's *Margaret of Anjou*, for instance, I dare say, persuaded half her spectators that Franklin's "Earl of Warwick" was a noble poem. The reading man, who had seen the piece at night adorned by her acting, would, no doubt, next morning, on perusal, find that her performance alone had given splendour to the meteor: but the unreading spectator would probably for ever consider "The Earl of Warwick" a tragedy as good as any of Shakespeare's.

The most pleasing points, therefore, in Mrs. Siddons's history, are her returns to the plays of Shakespeare. She chose the part of *Lady*

Macbeth for her second benefit this season, February 2, 1785.*

I regard the tragedy of "*Macbeth*," upon the whole, as the greatest treasure of our dramatic literature. We may look as Britons at Greek sculpture and Italian paintings, with a humble consciousness that our native art has never reached their perfection; but, in the drama, we can confront Æschylus himself with Shakespeare: and, of all modern theatres, *ours* alone can compete with the Greek in the unborrowed nativeness and sublimity of its superstition. In the grandeur of tragedy "*Macbeth*" has no parallel, till we go back to the "*Prometheus*, and the *Furies*," of the Attic stage. I could even produce, if it were not digressing too far from my subject, innumer-

* Cast of the other parts in the performance of "*Macbeth*," Feb. 2, 1785. *Macbeth*, Smith; *Macduff*, Brereton; *Banquo*, Bensley; *Witches*, Parsons, Moody, and Baddely.

able instances of striking similarity between the metaphorical mintage of Shakespeare's and of Æschylus's style,—a similarity, both in beauty and in the fault of excess, that, unless the contrary had been proved, would lead me to suspect our great dramatist to have been a studious Greek scholar. But their resemblance arose only from the consanguinity of nature.

In one respect, the tragedy of "Macbeth" always reminds me of Æschylus's poetry. It has scenes and conceptions absolutely too bold for representation. What stage could do justice to Æschylus, when the Titan Prometheus makes his appeal to the elements; and when the hammer is heard in the Scythian Desert that rivets his chains? Or when the Ghost of Clytemnestra rushes into Apollo's temple, and rouses the sleeping Furies? I wish to imagine these scenes: I should be sorry to see the acting of them attempted.

In like manner, there are parts of "*Macbeth*," which I delight to read much more than to see in the theatre. When the drum of the Scottish army is heard on the wild heath, and when I fancy it advancing, with its bowmen in front, and its spears and banners in the distance, I am always disappointed with *Macbeth's* entrance, at the head of a few kilted actors. Perhaps more effect might be given to this scene by stage preparation; though with the science of stage-effect I can pretend to little acquaintance. But, be that as it may, I strongly suspect that the appearance of the *Weird Sisters* is too wild and poetical for the possibility of its being ever duly acted in a theatre. Even with the exquisite music of Lock, the orgies of the *Witches* at their boiling cauldron is a burlesque and revolting exhibition. Could any stage contrivance make it seem sublime? No! I think it defies theatrical art to render it half so welcome as when we read it by the *mere* light of our own imaginations.

Nevertheless, I feel no inconsistency in reverting from these remarks to my first assertion, that, all in all, "Macbeth" is our greatest possession in dramatic poetry. With the exception of the *Weird Sisters*, it is not only admirably suited for stage representation, but it has given the widest scope to the greatest powers of British acting. It was restored to our Theatre by Garrick, with much fewer alterations than have generally mutilated the plays of Shakespeare. For two thirds of a century, before Garrick's time, "Macbeth" had been worse than banished from the stage: for it had been acted with D'Avenant's alterations, produced in 1672, in which every original beauty was either awkwardly disguised, or arbitrarily omitted. Yet, so ignorant were Englishmen, that "The Tatler" quotes Shakespeare's "Macbeth" from D'Avenant's alteration of it; and when Quin heard of Garrick's intention to restore the original, he asked with astonishment, "Have I not all this time been acting Shakespeare's play?"

Lady Macbeth, though not so intensely impassioned as *Constance*, is a more important character in the tragedy to which she belongs. She is a larger occupant of our interest on the stage, and a more full and finished poetical creation. The part accordingly proved, as might have been expected, Mrs. Siddons's masterpiece. It was an era in one's life to have seen her in it. She was Tragedy personified.

Mrs. Siddons has left, in her Memoranda, the following

“Remarks on the Character of Lady Macbeth.

“In this astonishing creature one sees a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition has almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature; in whose composition are associated all the subjugating powers of intellect and all the charms and graces of personal beauty. You will probably not agree with me as to the character of that beauty; yet, perhaps, this difference of opinion will be entirely

attributable to the difficulty of your imagination disengaging itself from that idea of the person of her representative which you have been so long accustomed to contemplate. According to my notion, it is of that character which I believe is generally allowed to be most captivating to the other sex,—fair, feminine, nay, perhaps, even fragile—

‘ Fair as the forms that, wove in Fancy’s loom,
Float in light visions round the poet’s head.’

Such a combination only, respectable in energy and strength of mind, and captivating in feminine loveliness, could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless, a character so amiable, so honourable as *Macbeth*,—to seduce him to brave all the dangers of the present and all the terrors of a future world; and we are constrained, even whilst we abhor his crimes, to pity the infatuated victim of such a thralldom. His letters, which have informed her of the predictions of those preternatural beings who accosted him

on the heath, have lighted up into daring and desperate determinations all those pernicious slumbering fires which the enemy of man is ever watchful to awaken in the bosoms of his unwary victims. To his direful suggestions she is so far from offering the least opposition, as not only to yield up her soul to them, but moreover to invoke the sightless ministers of remorseless cruelty to extinguish in her breast all those compunctious visitings of nature which otherwise might have been mercifully interposed to counteract, and perhaps eventually to overcome, their unholy instigations. But having impiously delivered herself up to the excitements of hell, the pitifulness of heaven itself is withdrawn from her, and she is abandoned to the guidance of the demons whom she has invoked.

“Here I cannot resist a little digression, to observe how sweetly contrasted with the conduct of this splendid fiend is that of the noble single-minded *Banquo*. He, when under the same species of temptation, having been alarmed,

as it appears, by some wicked suggestions of the *Weird Sisters*, in his last night's dream, puts up an earnest prayer to heaven to have these cursed thoughts restrained in him, '*which nature gives way to in repose.*' Yes, even as to that time when he is not accountable either for their access or continuance, he remembers the precept, 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

"To return to the subject. *Lady Macbeth*, thus adorned with every fascination of mind and person, enters for the first time, reading a part of one of those portentous letters from her husband. 'They met me in the day of success; and I have learnt by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burnt with desire to question them further, they made themselves into thin air, into which they vanished. Whilst I stood wrapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all hailed me 'Thane of Cawdor,' by which title before these Sisters

had saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with '*Hail, King that shall be!*' This I have thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell.' Now vaulting ambition and intrepid daring rekindle in a moment all the splendours of her dark blue eyes. She fatally resolves that *Glamis* and *Cawdor* shall be also that which the mysterious agents of the Evil One have promised. She then proceeds to the investigation of her husband's character :

‘ Yet I do fear thy nature,
It is too full of the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That thou wouldst holily. Wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou 'dst have great
Glamis,
That which cries, *Thus thou must do if thou have it!*
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone.’

“ In this development, we find that, though

ambitious, he is yet amiable, conscientious, nay pious; and yet of a temper so irresolute and fluctuating, as to require all the efforts, all the excitement, which her uncontrollable spirit, and her unbounded influence over him, can perform. She continues—

‘Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown’d withal.’

“Shortly *Macbeth* appears. He announces the King’s approach; and she, insensible it should seem to all the perils which he has encountered in battle, and to all the happiness of his safe return to her,—for not one kind word of greeting or congratulation does she offer,—is so entirely swallowed up by the horrible design, which has probably been suggested to her by his letters, as to have entirely forgotten both the one and the other. It is very remarkable that *Macbeth* is frequent in expressions of ten-

derness to his wife, while she never betrays one symptom of affection towards him, till, in the fiery furnace of affliction, her iron heart is melted down to softness. For the present she flies to welcome the venerable gracious *Duncan*, with such a shew of eagerness, as if allegiance in her bosom sat crowned with devotion and gratitude.

“ *The Second Act.*

“There can be no doubt that *Macbeth*, in the first instance, suggested his design of assassinating the king, and it is probable that he has invited his gracious sovereign to his castle, in order the more speedily and expeditiously to realize those thoughts, ‘*whose murder, though but yet fantastical, so shook his single state of man.*’ Yet, on the arrival of the amiable monarch who had so honoured him of late, his naturally benevolent and good feelings resume their wonted power. He then solemnly communes with his heart, and after much powerful reasoning upon the danger of the undertaking, calling to mind that *Duncan* his king, of the

mildest virtues, and his kinsman, lay as his guest. All those accumulated determents, with the violated rights of sacred hospitality bringing up the rear, rising all at once in terrible array to his awakened conscience, he relinquishes the atrocious purpose, and wisely determines to proceed no further in the business. But, now, behold his evil genius, his grave-charm, appears, and by the force of her revilings, her contemptuous taunts, and, above all, by her opprobrious aspersion of cowardice, chases the gathering drops of humanity from his eyes, and drives before her impetuous and destructive career all those kindly charities, those impressions of loyalty, and pity, and gratitude, which, but the moment before, had taken full possession of his mind. She says,

‘I have given suck, and know
How tender ’tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck’d my nipple from its boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out,—had I but so sworn
As you have done to this.’

“Even here, horrific as she is, she shews herself made by ambition, but not by nature, a perfectly savage creature. The very use of such a tender allusion in the midst of her dreadful language, persuades one unequivocally that she has really felt the maternal yearnings of a mother towards her babe, and that she considered this action the most enormous that ever required the strength of human nerves for its perpetration. Her language to *Macbeth* is the most potently eloquent that guilt could use. It is only in soliloquy that she invokes the powers of hell to unsex her. To her husband she avows, and the naturalness of her language makes us believe her, that she had felt the instinct of filial as well as maternal love. But she makes her very virtues the means of a taunt to her lord:—‘You have the milk of human kindness in your heart,’ she says (in substance) to him, ‘but ambition, which is my ruling passion, would be also yours if you had courage. With a hankering desire to

suppress, if you could, all your weaknesses of sympathy, you are too cowardly to will the deed, and can only dare to wish it. You speak of sympathies and feelings. I too have felt with a tenderness which your sex cannot know; but I am resolute in my ambition to trample on all that obstructs my way to a crown. Look to me, and be ashamed of your weakness.' Abashed, perhaps, to find his own courage humbled before this unimaginable instance of female fortitude, he at last screws up his courage to the sticking-place, and binds up each corporal agent to this terrible feat. It is the dead of night. The gracious *Duncan*, now shut up in measureless content, reposes sweetly, while the restless spirit of wickedness resolves that he shall wake no more. The daring fiend, whose pernicious potions have stupified his attendants, and who even laid their daggers ready,—her own spirit, as it seems, exalted by the power of wine,—proceeds, 'That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold,' now

enters the gallery, in eager expectation of the results of her diabolical diligence. In the tremendous suspense of these moments, while she recollects her habitual humanity, one trait of tender feeling is expressed, 'Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it.' Her humanity vanishes, however, in the same instant; for when she observes that *Macbeth*, in the terror and confusion of his faculties, has brought the daggers from the place where they had agreed they should remain for the crimination of the grooms, she exhorts him to return with them to that place, and to smear those attendants of the sovereign with blood. He, shuddering, exclaims, 'I'll go no more! I am affear'd to think of what I have done. Look on't again I dare not.'

"Then instantaneously the solitary particle of her human feeling is swallowed up in her remorseless ambition, and, wrenching the daggers from the feeble grasp of her husband, she finishes

the act which the infirm of purpose had not courage to complete, and calmly and steadily returns to her accomplice with the fiend-like boast,

‘ My hands are of your colour ;
But I would scorn to wear a heart so white.’

“ A knocking at the gate interrupts this terrific dialogue ; and all that now occupies her mind is urging him to wash his hands and put on his nightgown, ‘*lest occasion call,*’ says she, ‘*and shew us to be the watchers.*’ In a deplorable depravation of all rational knowledge, and lost to every recollection except that of his enormous guilt, she hurries him away to their own chamber.

“ *The Third Act.*

“The golden round of royalty now crowns her brow, and royal robes enfold her form ; but the peace that passeth all understanding is lost

to her for ever, and the worm that never dies already gnaws her heart.

‘ Nought’s had—all’s spent,
Where our desire is had without content.
’Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.’

“Under the impression of her present wretchedness, I, from this moment, have always assumed the dejection of countenance and manners which I thought accordant to such a state of mind; and, though the author of this sublime composition has not, it must be acknowledged, given any direction whatever to authorize this assumption, yet I venture to hope that he would not have disapproved of it. It is evident, indeed, by her conduct in the scene which succeeds the mournful soliloquy, that she is no longer the presumptuous, the determined creature, that she was before the assassination of the King: for instance, on the approach of her husband, we behold for the first time striking indications of sensibility,

nay, tenderness and sympathy; and I think this conduct is nobly followed up by her during the whole of their subsequent eventful intercourse. It is evident, I think, that the sad and new experience of affliction has subdued the insolence of her pride, and the violence of her will; for she comes now to seek him out, that she may, at least, participate his misery. She knows, by her own woful experience, the torment which he undergoes, and endeavours to alleviate his sufferings by the following inefficient reasonings:

‘How now, my lord—why do you keep alone?
Of sorriest fancies your companions making?
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on. Things without all remedy
Should be without regard. What’s done, is done.’

“Far from her former habits of reproach and contemptuous taunting, you perceive that she now listens to his complaints with sympathizing feelings; and, so far from adding to the weight of his affliction the burthen of her own, she

endeavours to conceal it from him with the most delicate and unremitting attention. But it is in vain ; as we may observe in his beautiful and mournful dialogue with the physician on the subject of his cureless malady : ‘ Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ? ’ &c. You now hear no more of her chidings and reproaches. No ; all her thoughts are now directed to divert his from those sorriest fancies, by turning them to the approaching banquet, in exhorting him to conciliate the goodwill and good thoughts of his guests, by receiving them with a disengaged air, and cordial, bright, and jovial demeanour. Yes ; smothering her sufferings in the deepest recesses of her own wretched bosom, we cannot but perceive that she devotes herself entirely to the effort of supporting him.

“ Let it be here recollected, as some palliation of her former very different deportment, she had, probably, from childhood

commanded all around her with a high hand ; had uninterruptedly, perhaps, in that splendid station, enjoyed all that wealth, all that nature had to bestow ; that she had, possibly, no directors, no controllers, and that in womanhood her fascinated lord had never once opposed her inclinations. But now her new-born relentings, under the rod of chastisement, prompt her to make palpable efforts in order to support the spirits of her weaker, and, I must say, more selfish husband. Yes ; in gratitude for his unbounded affection, and in commiseration of his sufferings, she suppresses the anguish of her heart, even while that anguish is precipitating her into the grave which at this moment is yawning to receive her.

“ *The Banquet.*

“ Surrounded by their court, in all the apparent ease and self-complacency of which their wretched souls are destitute, they are now seated at the royal banquet ; and although,

through the greater part of this scene, *Lady Macbeth* affects to resume her wonted domination over her husband, yet, notwithstanding all this self-control, her mind must even then be agonized by the complicated pangs of terror and remorse. For, what imagination can conceive her tremors, lest at every succeeding moment *Macbeth*, in his distraction, may confirm those suspicions, but ill concealed, under the loyal looks and cordial manners of their facile courtiers, when, with smothered terror, yet domineering indignation, she exclaims, upon his agitation at the ghost of *Banquo*, ‘Are you a man?’ *Macbeth* answers,

‘Aye, a bold one—that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.’

Lady Macbeth.

‘Oh, proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear;
This is the air-drawn dagger which, ye said,
Led you to Duncan:—Oh, these flaws and starts,

Impostors to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam—Shame itself.
Why do you make such faces? when all's done,
You look but on a stool.'

" Dying with fear, yet assuming the utmost composure, she returns to her stately canopy; and, with trembling nerves, having tottered up the steps to her throne, that bad eminence, she entertains her wondering guests with frightful smiles, with over-acted attention, and with fitful graciousness; painfully, yet incessantly, labouring to divert their attention from her husband. Whilst writhing thus under her internal agonies, her restless and terrifying glances towards *Macbeth*, in spite of all her efforts to suppress them, have thrown the whole table into amazement; and the murderer then suddenly breaks up the assembly, by the following confession of his horrors:

' Can such things be,
And overcome us like a summer cloud,

Without our special wonder? You make me
Even to the disposition that I am,
When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
When mine is blanched with fear.'

Rosse.

'What sight, my lord?'

"What imitation, in such circumstances as these, would ever satisfy the demands of expectation? The terror, the remorse, the hypocrisy of this astonishing being, flitting in frightful succession over her countenance, and actuating her agitated gestures with her varying emotions, present, perhaps, one of the greatest difficulties of the scenic art, and cause her representative no less to tremble for the suffrage of her private study, than for its public effect.

"It is now the time to inform you of an idea which I have conceived of *Lady Macbeth's* character, which perhaps will appear as fanciful

as that which I have adopted respecting the style of her beauty ; and, in order to justify this idea, I must carry you back to the scene immediately preceding the banquet, in which you will recollect the following dialogue :

‘ Oh, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife ;
Thou knowest that Banquo and his Fleance live.’

Lady Macbeth.

‘ But in them Nature’s copy ’s not eterne.’

Macbeth.

‘ There ’s comfort yet—they are assailable.
Then be thou jocund ; ere the bat has flown
His cloistered flight—ere to black Hecate’s summons
The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night’s yawning peal—there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.’

Lady Macbeth.

‘ What’s to be done ?’

Macbeth.

‘ Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, unfeeling night,
Scarf up the tender, pitiful eye of day,

And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow
Makes way to the rooky wood.—
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse.
Thou marvellest at my words—but hold thee still ;
Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ill.'

“ Now, it is not possible that she should hear all these ambiguous hints about *Banquo* without being too well aware that a sudden, lamentable fate awaits him. Yet, so far from offering any opposition to *Macbeth's* murderous designs, she even hints, I think, at the facility, if not the expediency, of destroying both *Banquo* and his equally unoffending child, when she observes that, ‘ *in them Nature's copy is not eterne.*’ Having, therefore, now filled the measure of her crimes, I have imagined that the last appearance of *Banquo's* ghost became no less visible to her eyes than it became to those of her husband. Yes, the spirit of the noble *Banquo* has smilingly filled up, even to over-

flowing, and now commends to her own lips the ingredients of her poisoned chalice.

“ The Fifth Act.

“ Behold her now, with wasted form, with wan and haggard countenance, her starry eyes glazed with the ever-burning fever of remorse, and on their lids the shadows of death. Her ever-restless spirit wanders in troubled dreams about her dismal apartment; and, whether waking or asleep, the smell of innocent blood incessantly haunts her imagination:

‘ Here’s the smell of the blood still.
All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten
This little hand.’

“ How beautifully contrasted is this exclamation with the bolder image of *Macbeth*, in expressing the same feeling !

‘ Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash the blood
Clean from this hand ?’

And how appropriately either sex illustrates the same idea!

“ During this appalling scene, which, to my sense, is the most so of them all, the wretched creature, in imagination, acts over again the accumulated horrors of her whole conduct. These dreadful images, accompanied with the agitations they have induced, have obviously accelerated her untimely end; for in a few moments the tidings of her death are brought to her unhappy husband. It is conjectured that she died by her own hand. Too certain it is, that she dies, and makes no sign. I have now to account to you for the weakness which I have, a few lines back, ascribed to *Macbeth*; and I am not quite without hope that the following observations will bear me out in my opinion. Please to observe, that he (I must think pusillanimously, when I compare his conduct to her forbearance,) has been continually pouring out his miseries to his wife. His heart has therefore been eased, from time to time, by

unloading its weight of woe; while she, on the contrary, has perseveringly endured in silence the uttermost anguish of a wounded spirit.

‘ The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o’erfraught heart, and bids it break.’

“ Her feminine nature, her delicate structure, it is too evident, are soon overwhelmed by the enormous pressure of her crimes. Yet it will be granted, that she gives proofs of a naturally higher toned mind than that of *Macbeth*. The different physical powers of the two sexes are finely delineated, in the different effects which their mutual crimes produce. Her frailer frame, and keener feelings, have now sunk under the struggle—his robust and less sensitive constitution has not only resisted it, but bears him on to deeper wickedness, and to experience the fatal fecundity of crime.

‘ For mine own good—All causes shall give way.
I am in blood so far stepp’d in, that should I wade
no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o’er.’

Henceforth, accordingly, he perpetrates horrors to the day of his doom.

“In one point of view, at least, this guilty pair extort from us, in spite of ourselves, a certain respect and approbation. Their grandeur of character sustains them both above recrimination (the despicable accustomed resort of vulgar minds,) in adversity; for the wretched husband, though almost impelled into this gulph of destruction by the instigations of his wife, feels no abatement of his love for her, while she, on her part, appears to have known no tenderness for him, till, with a heart bleeding at every pore, she beholds in him the miserable victim of their mutual ambition. Unlike the first frail pair in Paradise, they spent not the fruitless hours in mutual accusation.”

Mrs. Siddons had played *Lady Macbeth* in the provincial theatres many years before she attempted the character in London. Adverting

to the first time this part was allotted to her, she says, "It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up, as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of *Lady Macbeth*. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But, to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night, (a night I never can forget,) till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room, in a paroxysm of

terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out; and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes. At peep of day I rose to resume my task; but so little did I know of my part when I appeared in it, at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life.

“About six years afterwards I was called upon to act the same character in London. By this time I had perceived the difficulty of assuming a personage with whom no one feeling of common general nature was congenial or assistant. One's own heart could prompt one to express, with some degree of truth, the sen-

timents of a mother, a daughter, a wife, a lover, a sister, &c., but, to adopt this character, must be an effort of the judgment alone.

“Therefore it was with the utmost diffidence, nay terror, that I undertook it, and with the additional fear of Mrs. Pritchard’s reputation in it before my eyes. The dreaded first night at length arrived, when, just as I had finished my toilette, and was pondering with fearfulness my first appearance in the grand fiendish part, comes Mr. Sheridan, knocking at my door, and insisting, in spite of all my entreaties not to be interrupted at this to me tremendous moment, to be admitted. He would not be denied admittance; for he protested he must speak to me on a circumstance which so deeply concerned my own interest, that it was of the most serious nature. Well, after much squabbling, I was compelled to admit him, that I might dismiss him the sooner, and compose myself before the play began. But, what was my

distress and astonishment, when I found that he wanted me, even at this moment of anxiety and terror, to adopt another mode of acting the sleeping scene. He told me he had heard with the greatest surprise and concern that I meant to act it without holding the candle in my hand; and, when I urged the impracticability of washing out that '*damned spot*,' with the vehemence that was certainly implied by both her own words, and by those of her gentleman, he insisted, that if I did put the candle out of my hand, it would be thought a presumptuous innovation, as Mrs. Pritchard had always retained it in hers. My mind, however, was made up, and it was then too late to make me alter it; for I was too agitated to adopt another method. My deference for Mr. Sheridan's taste and judgment was, however, so great, that, had he proposed the alteration whilst it was possible for me to change my own plan, I should have yielded to his suggestion; though, even then, it would have been against

my own opinion, and my observation of the accuracy with which somnambulists perform all the acts of waking persons. The scene, of course, was acted as I had myself conceived it; and the innovation, as Mr. Sheridan called it, was received with approbation. Mr. Sheridan himself came to me, after the play, and most ingenuously congratulated me on my obstinacy. When he was gone out of the room I began to undress; and, while standing up before my glass, and taking off my mantle, a diverting circumstance occurred, to chase away the feelings of this anxious night; for, while I was repeating, and endeavouring to call to mind the appropriate tone and action to the following words, 'Here's the smell of blood still!' my dresser innocently exclaimed, 'Dear me, ma'am, how very hysterical you are to-night; I protest and vow, ma'am, it was not blood, but rose-pink and water; for I saw the property-man mix it up with my own eyes.'"

CHAPTER II.

CONTENTS.

Observations on Mrs. Siddons's Estimate of *Lady*
Macbeth's Character, and on that given by Mrs.
Jameson, in her "Characteristics of Women."

CHAPTER II.

THOSE who have read Mrs. Jameson's admirable "Characteristics of Women," must have remarked the general similarity of her opinions respecting *Lady Macbeth's* character, to those delivered by Mrs. Siddons, in the foregoing critique. If there be any difference, it is that the former goes a shade farther than Mrs. Siddons, in her advocacy of Shakespeare's heroine.

Whether Mrs. Jameson heard of Mrs. Siddons's ideas on the subject, which she might by possibility, as the great actress made no secret of them, I have never been in the least

anxious to ascertain, because it is plain, from her writings, that Mrs. Jameson has a mind too original, to require or to borrow suggestions from any one. But, in deprecating all suspicion of obligation on the one side, I have an equal right to exclude the possibility of its being suspected on the other. Mrs. Siddons shewed me these Remarks on the character of *Lady Macbeth* some nineteen years ago, so that there can be little doubt of their having been earlier written than those of the authoress of "The Characteristics."

In a general view, I agree with both of the fair advocates of *Lady Macbeth*, that the language of preceding critics was rather unmeasured, when they described her as "*thoroughly hateful, invariably savage, and purely demoniac*. It is true, that the ungentlemanly epithet, fiend-like, is applied to her by Shakespeare himself, but then he puts it into the mouth of *King Malcolm*, who might naturally be incensed.

Lady Macbeth is not thoroughly hateful, for she is not a virago, not an adultress, not impelled by revenge. On the contrary, she expresses no feeling of personal malignity towards any human being in the whole course of her part. Shakespeare could have easily displayed her crimes in a more commonplace and accountable light, by assigning some feudal grudge as a mixed motive of her cruelty to *Duncan*; but he makes her a murderess in cold blood, and from the sole motive of ambition, well knowing, that if he had broken up the inhuman serenity of her remorselessness by the ruffling of anger, he would have vulgarized the features of the splendid Titaness.

By this entire absence of petty vice and personal virulence, and by concentrating all the springs of her conduct into the one determined feeling of ambition, the mighty poet has given her character a statue-like simplicity, which, though cold, is spirit-stirring, from the wonder

it excites, and which is imposing, although its respectability consists, as far as the heart is concerned, in merely negative decencies. How many villains walk the world in credit to their graves, from the mere fulfilment of those negative decencies. Had *Lady Macbeth* been able to smother her husband's babblings, she might have been one of them.

Shakespeare makes her a great character, by calming down all the pettiness of vice, and by giving her only one ruling passion, which, though criminal, has at least a lofty object, corresponding with the firmness of her will and the force of her intellect. The object of her ambition was a crown, which, in the days in which we suppose her to have lived, was a miniature symbol of divinity. Under the full impression of her intellectual powers, and with a certain allowance which we make for the illusion of sorcery, the imagination suggests to us something like a half-apology for her

ambition. Though I can vaguely imagine the supernatural agency of the spiritual world, yet I know so little precisely about fiends or demons, that I cannot pretend to estimate the relation of their natures to that of Shakespeare's heroine. But, as a human being, *Lady Macbeth* is too intellectual to be thoroughly hateful. Moreover, I hold it no paradox to say, that the strong idea which Shakespeare conveys to us of her intelligence, is heightened by its contrast with that partial shade which is thrown over it, by her sinful will giving way to superstitious influences. At times she is deceived, we should say, prosaically speaking, by the infatuation of her own wickedness, or, poetically speaking, by the agency of infernal tempters; otherwise she could not have imagined for a moment that she could palm upon the world the chamberlains of *Duncan* for his real murderers. Yet her mind, under the approach of this portentous and unnatural eclipse, in spite of its black illusions, has light enough remaining to shew us a

reading of *Macbeth's* character, such as Lord Bacon could not have given to us more philosophically, or in fewer words.

All this, however, only proves *Lady Macbeth* to be a character of brilliant understanding, lofty determination, and negative decency. That the poet meant us to conceive her more than a piece of august atrocity, or to leave a tacit understanding of her being naturally amiable, I make bold to doubt. Mrs. Siddons, disposed by her own nature to take the most softened views of her heroine, discovers, in her conduct towards *Macbeth*, a dutiful and unselfish tenderness, which, I own, is far from striking me. "*Lady Macbeth*," she says, "seeks out *Macbeth*, that she may at least participate in his wretchedness." But is *that* her real motive? No; *Lady Macbeth*, in that scene, seems to me to have no other object than their common preservation. She finds that he is shunning society, and is giving himself up to "*his sorry*

fancies." Her trying to snatch him from these is a matter of policy ;—a proof of her sagacity, and not of her social sensibility. At least, insensitive as we have seen her to the slightest joy at the return of her husband, it seems unnecessary to ascribe to her any new-sprung tenderness, when self-interest sufficiently accounts for her conduct.

Both of her fair advocates lay much stress on her abstaining from vituperation towards *Macbeth*, when she exhorts him to retire to rest, after the banquet. But, here I must own, that I can see no proof of her positive tenderness. Repose was necessary to *Macbeth's* recovery. Their joint fate was hanging by a hair; and she knew that a breath of her reproach, by inflaming him to madness, would break that hair, and plunge them both into exposure and ruin. Common sense is always respectable; and here it is joined with command of temper and matrimonial faith. But still her object includes her

own preservation ; and we have no proof of her alleged tenderness and sensibility.

If *Lady Macbeth's* male critics have dismissed her with ungallant haste and harshness, I think the eloquent authoress of the "Characteristics of Women" has tried rather too elaborately to prove her positive virtues, by speculations which, to say the least of them, if they be true, are not certain. She goes beyond Mrs. Siddons's toleration of the heroine; and, getting absolutely in love with her, exclaims, "What would not the firmness, the self-command, the ardent affections of this woman have performed, if properly directed !" Why, her firmness and self-command are very evident; but, as to her ardent affections, I would ask, on what other object on earth she bestows them except the crown of Scotland? We are told, however, that her husband loves her, and that therefore she could not be naturally bad. But, in the first place, though we are not

directly told so, we may be fairly allowed to imagine her a very beautiful woman; and, with beauty and superior intellect, it is easy to conceive her managing and making herself necessary to *Macbeth*, a man comparatively weak, and, as we see, facile to wickedness. There are instances of atrocious women having swayed the hearts of more amiable men. What debars me from imagining that *Lady Macbeth* had obtained this conjugal ascendancy by anything amiable in her nature, is, that she elicits *Macbeth's* warmest admiration in the utterance of atrocious feelings;—at least, such I consider those expressions to be which precede his saying to her, “Bring forth men-children only.”

But here I am again at issue with the ingenious authoress of the “Characteristics,” who reads in those very expressions, that strike me as proofs of atrocity, distinct evidence of *Lady Macbeth's amiable character*: since, she

declares that she had known what it was to have loved the offspring she suckled. The majority of she-wolves, I conceive, would make the same declaration, if they could speak, though they would probably omit the addition about dashing out the suckling's brains. Again: she is amiably unable to murder the sleeping King, because, to use Mrs. Jameson's words, "he brings to her the dear and venerable image of her father." Yes: but she can send in her husband to do it for her. Did Shakespeare intend us to believe this murderess naturally compassionate?

It seems to me, also, to be far from self-evident that *Lady Macbeth* is not naturally cruel, because she calls on all the demons of human thought to unsex her; or because she dies of what her apologist calls remorse. If by that word we mean true contrition, Shakespeare gives no proof of her having shown such a feeling. Her death is mysterious; and we

generally attribute it to despair and suicide. Even her terrible and thrice-repeated sob of agony, in the sleep-walking scene, shows a conscience haunted indeed by terrors, but not penitent; for she still adheres to her godless old ground of comfort, that "*Banquo is in his grave.*"

She dies,—she is swept away darkly from before us to her great account. I say, that we have a tragic satisfaction in her death: and though I grant that we do not exult over her fate, yet I find no argument, in this circumstance, against her natural enormity. To see a fellow-creature, a beautiful woman, with a bright, bold intellect, thus summoned to her destiny, creates a religious feeling too profound for exultation.

In this terribly swift succession of her punishment to her crimes, lies one of the master-traits of skill by which Shakespeare

contrives to make us blend an awful feeling, somewhat akin to pity, with our satisfaction at her death.

Still I am persuaded that Shakespeare never meant her for anything better than a character of superb depravity, and a being, with all her decorum and force of mind, naturally cold and remorseless. When Mrs. Jameson asks us, what might not religion have made of such a character? she puts a question that will equally apply to every other enormous criminal; for, the worst heart that ever beat in a human breast would be at once rectified, if you could impress it with a genuine religious faith. But if Shakespeare intended us to believe *Lady Macbeth's* nature a soil peculiarly adapted for the growth of religion, he has chosen a way very unlike his own wisdom in portraying her, for he exhibits her as a practical infidel in a simple age: and he makes her words sum up all the essence of that unnatural irreligion,

which cannot spring up to the head without having its root in a callous heart. She holds that

“ The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures.”

And that

“ Things without remedy,
Should be without regard.”

There is something hideous in the very strength of her mind, that can dive down, like a wounded monster, to such depths of consolation.

She is a splendid picture of evil, nevertheless,—a sort of sister of Milton's *Lucifer* ; and, like him, we surely imagine her externally majestic and beautiful. Mrs. Siddons's idea of her having been a delicate and blonde beauty, seems to me to be a pure caprice. The public would have ill exchanged such a representative of *Lady Macbeth*, for the dark locks and the eagle eyes of Mrs. Siddons.

In some other characters which Mrs. Siddons performed, the memory of the old, or the imagination of the young, might possibly conceive her to have had a substitute ; but not in *Lady Macbeth*. The moment she seized the part, she identified her image with it in the minds of the living generation.

CHAPTER III.

CONTENTS.

Continuation of the Season at Drury Lane—Mrs. Siddons plays *Desdemona*, Mason's *Elfrida*, and *Rosalind*, in "As You Like It"—Mrs. Siddons in Scotland—Season 1785-6—She appears in the "Jubilee"—in Jephson's "Braganza"—as *Mrs. Lovemore*, in Murphy's Comedy of "The Way to Keep Him"—as *Hermione*, in "The Distressed Mother"—as *Ophelia*.

CHAPTER III.

IN some of the greatest dramatic characters, Mrs. Siddons needed only to look like her usual majestic self, in order to make you imagine that the poet had written the part for her. Her peculiar element was the sublime and energetic; and to have seen her *Lady Macbeth* might well inspire an incredulity as to the possibility of the same individual passing, with felicity, from the terrors of *Duncan's* murderess to look the gentleness of *Desdemona*. It is true that the bride of *Othello* is, with all her gentleness, a great being; and is as resolute in adherence to the noble Moor, as she had before been meekly duteous to her father. Moreover, if it be alleged that love alone makes her bold, be it remembered that her love itself is a high and

pure passion, founded on the moral worth of her lord. But still there is a subdued spirit, a lowly, violet-like sweetness in *Desdemona*, that makes me wonder, at this day, how the august Siddons could have personated her as she did, even to perfect illusion. I can record the fact that she did so, from satisfactory evidence.

Under that head I am far from ranking my own humble testimony; but, leaving that to be valued at the reader's will, I beg leave to say that whether she might be greater or not, in other parts, I never wondered at her in any character so much as in *Desdemona*. Miss O'Neil was beautiful in the part, but nothing like Mrs. Siddons. The first time I saw the great actress represent *Desdemona* was at Edinburgh, when I was a very young man, (I think it was in 1798.) I had gone into the theatre without a play-bill. I knew not that she was in the place. I had never seen her before since I was a child of eight years old; and,

though I ought to have recognized her from that circumstance, and from her picture, yet I was for sometime not aware that I was looking at the Tragic Queen. But her exquisite gracefulness, and the emotions and plaudits of the house, ere long convinced me that she must be some very great actress,—only the notion I had preconceived of her pride and majesty made me think that “ *this soft, sweet creature, could not be the Siddons.*” When I asked the person next me the name of the actress, I felt, or fancied, a tone of rebuke in his answer; as if he had said, Could you suppose that any other actress could affect the house in this manner?

I remember that what struck me with peculiar astonishment was the familiar, I had almost said playful, persuasiveness, with which she won over the Moor to *Cassio's* interest. In that scene, it is my belief that no other actress ever softened and sweetened tragedy so originally.

I thank my brother biographer, Mr. Boaden, for saying, with equal truth and felicity of expression, that, in her acting of *Desdemona*, the very stature of the mighty actress seemed to be lowered. I am also happy to find my friend Mr. Bartley, the actor, enthusiastically fond of recollecting the Siddons's *Desdemona*. Nor do I value lightly the contemporary testimony of the daily press on this occasion. They unanimously agree as to the fact, that Mrs. Siddons increased her popularity, great as it was, by this performance; and one of them concludes his account of it, by saying that "in this wonderful transition from *Lady Macbeth* to the bride of *Othello*, Mrs. Siddons had shewn her genius to be a star of the first magnitude, that could reach and adorn the most distant and opposite points in the horizon of tragic excellence."

A circumstance, personally unfortunate to her, occurred in her first representation of the part. They gave her, with criminal negligence, a

damp bed to lie upon, in the death-scene, and she contracted from thence a rheumatic fever. Twice in the course of her life she encountered the most serious of stage perils. *Desdemona's* sheets had nearly killed her with cold; and afterwards, when she played *Hermione*, in the "Winter's Tale," from her drapery catching fire, she was in imminent danger of being burnt alive.

Apr. 14,
1785.

She appeared in no other new part till Mason's tragedy of "Elfrida," which had been admired at Buckingham House, was brought out by command of their Majesties.* Its author is mentioned with personal regard by Mrs. Siddons, in her *ms. Recollections*. Speaking of her friend Lady Harcourt's country seat, she

* Cast of parts: *Athelwold*, Smith; *Edgar*, Brereton; *Orgar*, J. Aickin; *Edwin*, Packer: *Elfrida*, Mrs. Siddons; *Albina*, Mrs. Brereton.

says, " When I was on my usual visit to this beautiful place, I have often walked arm-in-arm with the author of 'Caractacus,' and the amiable Whitehead. The former of these gentlemen, before I made his acquaintance, had conceived an inveterate dislike to me : he was a great humourist ; but, with all his oddities, a benevolent man. He was petted and coaxed by Lord Harcourt, and by all the visitors indeed, like a spoilt child. He hated me, because he could not bear that I should be even compared with his departed friend and favourite, Mrs. Pritchard ; and was so annoyed at the sound of my name, that, in order playfully to humour his prejudice, they sunk it, and always, in his hearing, called me the Lady. I arrived there at tea-time, and found him looking very sulky indeed, wrapt up in his Spanish cloak, which he called being out of humour. We happened somehow to be near each other at supper. I found his ice beginning to thaw, and the next morning, to the

great amusement of the whole party, we were detected practising a duet in the breakfast-room. From that time forth I had the honour of being in his good graces, for the too short period of his pious and valuable existence. When I arrived at his own habitation, on a visit for a few days, they told us he was absent, but would soon return. In the meantime, Mr. Siddons and I strolled to see him ; and, when we entered, we saw the venerable man, the almost adored parish priest, in the organ-loft, teaching the children some music for the next Sunday. We left him undisturbed in his pious occupation, and returned to his house, where he soon received us with heartfelt cordiality. He spoke broad Yorkshire, and good-naturedly allowed us to accuse him of affectation in so doing ; though, I believe, he was only affecting what was so natural to him that he could not avoid it."

With regard to Mrs. Siddons's *Elfrida*, I am inclined to believe the Journalist's blunt report

of her performance,* namely, that “she had acted everything in the part which she had to act, and looked the part as perfectly as possible ; but that her powers and graces were exerted in vain in so dull a drama.” She was called to perform it only twice.

There are two sorts of simplicity in the natural history of poets—the right sort, the manly simplicity, that makes him write like Burns and Crabbe, from the forcible dictates of nature ; and the wrong sort, perhaps, better entitled to the name of credulity, that gulls them to believe in the false resources of their art. The worthy and single-hearted Mason was of the latter description : he was one of those, to use Burns’ words,

* *Morning Chronicle for April 18, 1785.*—“ ‘Elfrida’ was not new to the stage when brought out at this period. It had been three times before tried at Covent Garden.” And, still more strange to say, was tried at that House once more, in 1792.

“ Who think to climb Parnassus’ hill
By dint o’ Greek.”

He not only persuaded himself that he could incorporate the Attic Chorus with the modern drama—an attempt like that of ingrafting a dead branch on a living tree, but he made his experiment with a play that is without action and without interest. We might forgive him for perverting history, and shewing off *Elfrida*, who was a barbarous traitress, as a tender wife, but it defies all patience to find her employed in nothing but making speeches, and calling on her waiting-maids to strike up Odes to the Rising Sun. In order to save her husband, and divert the King’s affection, she makes a promise to stain and deform her beauty, but she never performs it; and, when her lord is killed, she hurries off her poor maids into a nunnery, without consulting their inclinations. All this time he dreamt himself, and wrote to his friends, that he was imitating Sophocles!

Apr. 30.

~~~~~ The next new character which she performed was that of *Rosalind*, in "As You Like It." After a successful transition from the greatest to the gentlest parts of tragedy, it would have been but one step farther, in the versatility of genius, to have been at home in the enchanting *Rosalind*; and as the character, though comic, is not broadly so, and is as romantic and poetical as anything in tragedy, I somewhat grudgingly confess my belief, that her performance of it, though not a failure, seems to have fallen equally short of a triumph. It appears that she played the part admirably in some particulars. But, altogether, *Rosalind's* character has a gay and feathery lightness of spirits, which one can easily imagine more difficult for Mrs. Siddons to assume, than the tragic meekness of *Desdemona*. In "As You Like It," *Rosalind* is the soul of the piece, aided only by the *Clown*, (and, O that half the so-called wise were as clever as Shakespeare's clowns!)—she has to redeem the wildness of a forest, and the dulness

of rustic life. Her wit and beauty have "to throw a sunshine in the shady place." Abate but a spark of her spirit, and we should become, in the forest scenes, as melancholy and moralizing as *Jaques*. Shakespeare's *Rosalind*, therefore, requires the gayest and archest representative. In a letter from Mr. Young, which I have before me, he says, "Her *Rosalind* wanted neither playfulness nor feminine softness; but it was totally without archness,—not because she did not properly conceive it; but how could such a countenance be arch?"

Here alone, I believe, in her whole professional career, Mrs. Siddons found a rival, who beat her out of a single character. The rival *Rosalind* was Mrs. Jordan: but those who best remember Mrs. Jordan, will be the least surprised at her defeating her great cotemporary in this one instance. Mrs. Jordan was, perhaps, a little too much of the romp, in some touches of the part; but, altogether, she had the *naïveté*

of it to a degree that Shakespeare himself, if he had been a living spectator, would have gone behind the scenes to have saluted her for her success in it.

Anna Seward, who, though her taste was exceedingly bad in many points, had a due appreciation of our great actress, speaks of her as follows, in the part of *Rosalind*. "For the first time, I saw the justly celebrated Mrs. Siddons in comedy, in *Rosalind*; but, though her smile is as enchanting as her frown is magnificent—as her tears are irresistible, yet the playful scintillations of colloquial wit, which most strongly mark that character, suit not the dignity of the Siddonian form and countenance. Then her dress was injudicious. The scrupulous prudery of decency produced an ambiguous vestment, that seemed neither male nor female." "But," Miss Seward adds, "when she first came on as the *Princess*, nothing could be more charming; nor than when she resumed her original cha-

racter, and exchanged comic spirit for dignified tenderness."

During the season 1784-5, Mrs. Siddons performed seventy-one nights, and in seven new characters. Of these, she played *Margaret of Anjou* thrice; *Zara* twice; *Lady Macbeth* thirteen times; *Desdemona* four times; *Elfrida* twice; and *Rosalind* twice.

Mrs. Siddons's salary, as I have already mentioned, was, on her return to Drury Lane, in 1782, ten guineas per week. When John Kemble joined the company, his salary was five guineas.

In 1784, Mrs. Siddons's salary was raised to twenty-three guineas and seven shillings per week, and Mr. Kemble's to ten guineas.

In the summer of the year she performed at Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh, Belfast, and

Glasgow. On crossing the Tweed for a second time, she had no longer to complain of the sluggishness of Scottish enthusiasm. A rustic in the Glasgow theatre was so enchanted, that he exclaimed, "She is a fallen angel!" and in Edinburgh, the people collected in a vast crowd before her lodgings. Though there was a multitude, however, of the lowest people, there was not a mob. On the contrary, the decorousness of the national character was shewn, by the many thousands who collected to look at her, observing the most respectful silence. I heard another instance, lately, of the strong impression which she had now made on the feelings of the Scotch. A lady is still living in Edinburgh, who was at that period one of her ardent admirers, and who was herself looked up to, in the higher circles of the Scottish capital, for her taste and intelligence. Her once vivid faculties, however, are now sunk in the torpor of extreme old age. She is blind, and scarcely ever speaks, or expresses interest in any worldly

subject. A friend went to see her, and by some chance the name of Mrs. Siddons was mentioned, when the venerable invalid astonished her family by breaking her accustomed silence, and speaking of a matter that regarded this world, with warm and prolonged interest. She dwelt earnestly on her recollections of the great actress; and the subject brought smiles over her features, though they were pale with a hundred years.

Oct. 20.

Old Drury was again opened on the 7th of September, 1785. The first new part which she performed this season was that of the *Duchess*,\* in Jephson's "Braganza." In this character Mrs. Yates had been often admired; and I remember Mrs. Siddons saying that she thought "Braganza" very passable for a modern tragedy. Without pretending to uphold Jephson as any thing like a masterly dramatist, I must confess I have a certain liking for his

---

\* *Duke of Braganza*, Kemble; *Velasquez*, Smith.

literary memory. It may seem contemptuous to say that I cannot praise him so much as I could wish; but, since I knew nothing of the man, that very regret shows that his writings must have given me some pleasure. At a time when the native genius of Tragedy seemed to be extinct, he came boldly forward as a tragic poet, and, certainly, with a spark of talent: for if he has not the full flame of genius, he has at least its scintillating light. In fervor and boldness he is somewhat deficient; but, in more than one of his tragedies, I cannot help thinking him graceful and touching. The following scene, in his "Duke of Braganza," in which *Velasquez*, the Spanish minister, engages a monk to poison the *Duke*, appears to me to be far from indifferent:

TRAGEDY OF BRAGANZA.

Act 3, Scene 1. *The Apartments of VELASQUEZ.*

*Velasquez.*

'Attends the monk Ramirez?'

*Enter RAMIREZ.*

‘ You are welcome,  
Most welcome, reverend father. Pray draw near.  
We have a business for your privacy  
Of an especial kind : the circling air  
Should not partake it, nor the babbling winds,  
Lest their invisible wings disperse the breath  
Of that main secret which thy faithful bosom  
Is only fit to treasure.’

*Ramirez.*

‘ Good, my lord :  
I am no common talker.’

*Velasquez.*

‘ Well, I know it ;  
And therefore choose thee from the brotherhood ;  
Not one of whom but would lay by all thoughts  
Of earth and heaven, and fly to execute  
What I, the voice of Spain, commissioned him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Observe me well.

Think not I mean to snatch a thankless office,  
Who serves the state while I direct her helm.  
Say, can you be content in these poor weeds,—  
To know no earthly hopes beyond a cloister ;  
But, stretch’d on musty mats in noisome caves,  
To rouse at midnight bells, and mutter prayers,  
For souls beyond their reach, to senseless saints :



To wage perpetual war with nature's bounty :  
*To blacken sick men's chambers, and be number'd*  
*With the loath'd leavings of mortality—*  
*The watch-light, hour-glass, and the nauseous phial?*  
Are these the ends of life? Was this fine frame—  
Nerves exquisitely textur'd—soft desires—  
Aspiring thoughts—this comprehensive soul,  
With all her train of god-like faculties—  
Given to be sunk in this vile drudgery?'

*Ramirez.*

'These are the hard conditions of our state.  
We sow our humble seeds, with toil on death,  
To reap the harvest of our hopes in heaven.'

*Velasquez.*

'Yet wiser they who trust no future chance,  
But make this earth a heaven. Raise thy eyes  
Up to the temporal splendours of our church;  
Behold our priors, prelates, cardinals;  
Survey their large revenues, princely state,  
Their palaces of marble, beds of down;  
Their statues, pictures, baths, luxurious tables,  
That shame the fabled banquets of the gods!  
See how they weary art, and ransack nature,  
To leave no taste, no wish ungratified!  
Now—if thy spirit shrink not—I can raise thee  
To all this pomp and greatness. Pledge thy faith;  
Swear thou wilt do this thing—whate'er I urge;  
And Lisbon's envied crosier shall be thine.'

The next novelty of the season was the celebration of a pageant, called "The Jubilee." This entertainment, according to the cotemporary newspapers, had been written, prepared, and produced by Garrick, as a laughable representation of his own "Jubilee," held at Stratford-upon-Avon, in honour of Shakespeare, in 1769. At its first appearance it had had a run of seventy nights; and was deservedly a popular pageant, if we may trust the same newsmen, from its containing so much whimsical stage bustle, pleasant nonsense, charming music, and splendid representation. But, though it was now got up with great care and expense, I believe, its *pleasant nonsense* seldom occasioned a renewed exhibition. It contained a procession of emblematic theatrical characters, in which Mrs. Siddons appeared in a triumphal car as the Tragic Muse.

On the 26th of November, Mrs. Siddons played the part of *Mrs. Lovemore*, in Murphy's

comedy of "The Way to Keep Him;" a piece that is tolerably humorous, but very absurd, in its pretensions to moral meaning respecting the secret of preserving connubial happiness. *Mrs. Lovemore*, young, beautiful, and amiable, but of a serious temper, somewhat inclined to be sombrous, has to lament the estrangement of a husband, who seldom either dines or sleeps at home. The news that he spent his evenings at the house of a handsome widow, *Mrs. Belmour*, is first blabbed by a footman to a waiting-maid, and by her duly whispered to *Mrs. Lovemore*. To the suspected syren widow the forlorn wife repairs, introduces herself, though a stranger, and implores her not to rob her of her husband's society. The widow *Belmour* swears, as she can conscientiously, that she knows no such person as *Mr. Lovemore*; but she is receiving, as she conceives, the honourable addresses of an unmarried gentleman, *Lord Etheridge*; though, in due time, it turns out that her wooer has been wearing a false

title, and that *my Lord* and *Mr. Lovemore* are one and the same worthy person. On this discovery, she of course discards *Lord Etheridge*, but contracts a friendship for the injured wife; and puts her upon a plan for recovering her partner's "*lost affections*." It may puzzle the moralist to anticipate what human means are to secure the affections of such a vagrant as *Lovemore*; who, in the course of the play, utters not one word of truth, except when he tells *Sir Brilliant Fashion* "We are both rascals!" The widow *Belmour* advises his wife to rally her husband,—even to pique his jealousy a little; but at all events to be sprightly and joyous. In the sad reality of life, such a receipt for recovering stolen or strayed affections would, in all probability, be about as effective as advertising a reward for them by the town-crier. But they manage things better on the stage. The widow's counsel effects its end; and the piece ends happily.

The character of *Mrs. Lovemore*, though she is ultimately called on to assume hilarity, is thus, in the main, serious and pathetic ; and in so far it was appropriate to Mrs. Siddons : but it was complained of, and I fear with justice, that she made the injured wife too tragic for comedy. The cotemporary diurnals, indeed, almost unanimously pronounced her *Mrs. Lovemore* to be a total failure. In so far they contradicted themselves that they allowed she got some applause ; but they dressed their friendly regrets in the deepest mourning of language, and talked with solemn imagery of Mrs. Siddons's descent from the tragic throne, and of her appearing as the discrowned Queen of Tragedy by the side of Miss Farren, who was courtesying to far louder applauses than any that greeted the Siddons. It should have occurred to them, that if she did quit the Tragic throne for a night, there was nobody to step up to it in her place. At the same

time, it must be owned, that in the field of Comedy she gathered no laurels.

On the 27th of December, 1785, she gave birth to her second son, George. How fleeting is human life! I remember this son of Mrs. Siddons as freshly as if we had met but yesterday. He was then a youth about fourteen, and I recollect, when we sat together in the theatre, being struck by his sensibility at the sight of his mother's acting. About the third part of a century has since elapsed. George Siddons is now a grandfather, and has been thirty years in India, where he has made his fortune. His eldest daughter is married to the celebrated Oriental scholar, Mr. Wilson, of Oxford.

The very day after her appearance as *Mrs. Lovemore*, Covent Garden lost its best actor, and the British stage one of its brightest ornaments, by the death of Henderson. He was lamented by all who knew him, and by none

more than by Mrs. Siddons, who was bound to him by gratitude for his prediction of her greatness. She volunteered her services to his family; and on the 26th of February, 1786, she played *Belvidera*, for their benefit, at Covent Garden, which was then the more splendid of the two Houses, and capable of greater receipts. Mr. Pope was her *Jaffier*, and Aickin played *Pierre*.

1786. ~~~~~ During this season she appeared, in March, as the heroine, in Delap's "Captives,"\* and Mrs. Hannah More's "Percy."† If I were asked why she condescended to act in two such miserable

---

\* The tragedy of "The Captives" was acted March 9, 1786. *Erragon*, Prince of Sora, Smith; *Connal*, King of Morven, Barrymore; *Hidallan*, Bensley; *Malvina*, (the wife of *Erragon*,) Mrs. Siddons; *Minla*, (her Friend,) Miss Kemble.

† "Percy" was acted March 25. *Percy*, Palmer; *Douglas*, Kemble; *Raby*, J. Aickin; *Hubert*, Packer; *Elwina*, Mrs. Siddons; *Bertha*, Mrs. Ward.

tragedies, I should answer, that she had no power of rejecting any part in a play that was accepted by the Managers; and that if she had even possessed such a royal veto, its exercise might have been unsafe and invidious.

For her first benefit, this season, she played *Hermione*, in the "Distressed Mother;" preferring, in this instance, the part of the violent heroine, to that of the amiable *Andromache*, which was performed by her sister, Miss Kemble.\*

I am not surprised at her preference of the more vehement character; for the conscientious Distressed Mother is rather an insipid personage. She is the only character in the tragedy that is not in love, and yet the only

---

\* Cast of parts in "The Distressed Mother," as it was acted at Drury Lane, March 4, 1786. *Orestes*, Smith; *Pyrrhus*, Palmer: *Hermione*, Mrs. Siddons; *Andromache*, Miss Kemble.



one that escapes with good fortune. *Hermione*, on the contrary, engrosses all the little interest of the play, at least, in its English shape. In the French original, the sparkling graces of Racine's language partially atone to us for the thinness of his incidents, and the want of strength in his story. But the spirit of his style evaporates in the Englishman's transmutation of it into blank verse. Nevertheless, in the translation itself, though *Orestes* and the *Widow of Hector* are but dull worthies, some interest is left in *Hermione*. In the agony of her struggle to overcome her fondness for *Pyrrhus*, and to bestow it on *Orestes*, there is a strongly condensed utterance of passion in her words,

“And, if I've power o'er my own heart, 'tis his;”

and her turning round upon *Orestes*, with indignation and abhorrence at the murder which he has committed at her bidding, is at once poetically just, and dramatically striking.

In the scene, where *Hermione* commands *Orestes* to commit the murder, Mrs. Siddons was memorably impressive. The heroine says to her suitor,

‘Haste to the temple;  
Haste, prince, and sacrifice him.’

*Orestes.*

‘Whom?’

*Hermione.*

‘Why, *Pyrrhus*!’

Mrs. Siddons, at that word, disengaged her train from the upholding attendant, and pronounced the name of *Pyrrhus* with an emphasis that thrilled the remotest auditor.

I am surprised at Mr. Boaden’s affirming that, when this tragedy first came out, the writer of the *Spectator* used the little disingenuous art of totally concealing its French origin. That writer speaks of having seen “The Distressed Mother” performed; and, at the first performance, it was ushered in by a prologue

from the pen of Steele, in which direct notice is taken of its being a translation :

“ This piece, presented in a foreign tongue,  
When France was glorious, and her monarch young.”

After Steele's prologue had thus publicly advertised the fact, the *Spectator* would have been out of his wits, if he had thought of concealing it; and, indeed, he says nothing inconsistent with the supposition that it was commonly known. Phillips avowed himself Racine's translator, in the first copy of the play that he published.

For her second benefit, this season, Mrs. Siddons played *Ophelia*.\* Having never seen her in the character, I must own that I cannot speak of her performance of it without some doubt. On the one hand, Mr. Boaden says that she made it deeply affecting; and the

---

\* May 15, 1786. *Hamlet*, Kemble; the *Ghost*, Bensley.

criticism of the press generally concurs in extolling her performance of it, which makes it likely that there was a correspondent feeling in the public mind. It is also a striking circumstance, that her fellow actress, who played the *Queen*, in “*Hamlet*,” was so electrified by the Siddons’s looks, when she seized her arm, that she hesitated, and forgot her part. On the other hand, though Mrs. Siddons was a passable vocalist, yet I can hardly imagine her powers of singing adapted for the wild tenderness of *Ophelia* ; and, if she succeeded so absolutely in the part, why did she never perform it a second time ?\* Her greatness in the characters

---

\* The most interesting performance of *Ophelia* that I have met with on record, was that of Mrs. Susannah Mountfort, the daughter of the celebrated actor whose untimely death has been mentioned in the third chapter of the first of these volumes. I quote the anecdote from Mr. Genest’s “*Account of the English Stage*.” It was first given by Mrs. Bellamy, who had it from Colley Cibber. “*Mrs. Mountfort, during her last years, be-*

that formed her true element, forbids our ranging one iota beyond them in search of questionable merits. Her fame disdains all alliance with doubt.

Of all that has been written about *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, I best like the remarks of Mrs.

---

came deranged, but, as her disorder was not outrageous, she was not placed under any rigorous confinement, but was suffered to walk about her house. One day, in a lucid interval, she asked what play was to be performed that evening, and was told it was to be 'Hamlet.' Whilst she was on the stage she had acted *Ophelia* with great applause; the recollection struck her, and, with all that cunning which is so frequently allied to insanity, she found means to elude the care of her attendants, and got to the theatre, where, concealing herself till the scene where *Ophelia* was to make her appearance in her mad state, she pushed upon the stage before the person appointed to play the character, and exhibited a representation of it that astonished the performers as well as the audience. She exhausted her vital powers in this effort, was taken home, and died soon after."

Jameson, in her *Characteristics of Women*. If the authoress of that charming work had ever seen Mrs. Siddons in this part, I should go far to consult her opinion on the subject. But *Ophelia's* critic is of a later generation, and I ought not ungallantly to wish a lady to be older than she is.

The same evening that she played *Ophelia*, Mrs. Siddons performed, the *Lady*, in Milton's "Comus," if the masque can be called Milton's which was mutilated from the original, for stage performance, by Dalton and Colman. The latter of these stage adaptators tells us, that Milton's poetry, unless it caught the audience by singing, was always coldly received. If so, Mrs. Siddons's finest elocution could be of little avail. But the truth is, that Milton's poetry is not theatrical.

During this, which was her third season, Mrs. Siddons acted fifty-five times. I think it

was in the character of *Desdemona* alone that she could be said to have acquired fresh fame. In the summer recess, she made her usual tour of the provincial theatres.

## CHAPTER IV.



## CONTENTS.

Season at Drury Lane, 1786-7—Mrs. Siddons plays  
*Cleone—Imogen—Hortensia*, in the “Count of Nar-  
bonne”—*Lady Restless*, in the Comedy of “All in the  
Wrong”—*Julia*, in the “Italian Lover”—*Alicia*, in  
“Jane Shore.”

## CHAPTER IV.

1786. DRURY LANE was re-opened on the 16th of September, 1786. But Mrs. Siddons had no new part till the 22d of November; when Dodsley's tragedy of "Cleone" was brought out, for the first time at that house.\* It had been offered to Garrick as early as 1758, and his declining it was ascribed to the piece containing no part in which he could himself appear; though, in my humble opinion, the tragedy itself makes the best apology for his refusal. It was accepted, however, in the same year, at Covent Garden, where Mrs. Bellamy's bewitching screams gave it a run for sixteen nights,—exactly eight times the number of hearings which Mrs. Siddons's acting could ever obtain for it.

---

\* Cast of parts. *Sifroy*, J. Kemble; *Glanville*, Bensley; *Beaufort, sen.* J. Aickin; *Beaufort, jun.* Barrymore; *Cleone*, Mrs. Siddons; *Isabella*, Mrs. Ward.

It is well known that Robert Dodsley raised himself, by his talents and good conduct, from a humble station to wealth and consequence, and that he was a useful publisher, and a most respectable man. He left literature indebted to him on the whole; though not for this tragedy. Mr. Genest calls it tolerable: but I would rather substitute the words of *Dogberry*, that "*it is most tolerable, and not to be endured.*" The hero, *Sifroy*, is a sort of would-be *Othello*, with the difference, that *Othello* is of a noble nature, excited to jealousy by skilful villany, whilst *Sifroy* is a silly dupe of the shallowest artifice. In short, the dulness of "*Cleone*" has no relief, except its torpedo-like shocks of improbability.

Having had occasion, in writing the present work, to read over all the dull plays in which Mrs. Siddons was condemned to perform a part, I have endeavoured to indemnify myself by the reperusal of Shakespeare; and I have thus had room to speculate on the nature of dramatic

poetry, from the most contrasted impressions it could produce. The word *improbability* brings to my mind not only the besetting sin of the dramatic dunces, but a laughable apology for it which one of them offers, in the preface to his own condemned tragedy, and a protest which he solemnly enters against the injustice of its damnation. "You," (the critics of the day,) says the dolorous author, "harp eternally on my improbabilities. You deal rigorously with inferior dramatists on the score of their delinquencies as to the probable; but, when the same fault is found in some great master, like Shakespeare, oh, then you give the word probability quite a liberal and kindly latitude of interpretation. And is not *improbability* as great a sin in the richest as it is in the poorest dramatic genius?"

To this question, which reminds me of the ass in the fable, wondering why he might not fawn upon his master like a lap-dog, I trust the reader anticipates my answer, which is flatly—No! Improbability, for its own sake, we never

desire; but we forgive the fault, in proportion as it is redeemed by wit and genius. In truth, the inspired dramatist softens the aspect of improbability, and causes it to put on a look of the probable. He makes only an initiatory demand on our credulity; and then he pours in such successive touches of nature, that his picture of it becomes at once more pleasing than reality, and to our fascinated imagination, equally true.

In the "*Merchant of Venice*," for instance, though there are one or two stumbling-blocks at the threshold, over which the genius of Shakespeare alone could help us, yet, when we get over these, we find ourselves at home, and in a pleasant mansion. We must forget the difficulty of *Portia* disguising her sex, and appearing before the judgment-seat, as well as the improbable nature of the contract. But, surmount these obstacles, and the rest all follows like logic, for what can be more lawyer-like than the whole pleading of *Portia*, and the quibble by which she gets rid of the pound of flesh?

Here we have a true poet dealing with the daringly improbable; but, on the other hand, when the ungifted dramatist gets you into unlikely conceptions, he drags you through a slough of them; and he makes his improbabilities breed beyond Malthusian calculation.

In the Drama, it is clear that we must open our minds to the boldness of fiction, dramatic art being so extremely difficult. Its poet cannot, like a narrator, come forth and explain all matters himself, but must speak only through his characters; yet all the while he is bound to strike and surprise us. Common-place events will not serve this end: he must give us such as are uncommon. The uncommon borders on the marvellous; and the marvellous, though not necessarily incredible, requires a facile and fanciful state of belief. When dramatic poetry, therefore, reveals a certain degree of beauty, it expands the imagination beyond prosaic, and literal calculations into a willing faith in ro-

mantic probability. A solid dunce he must be who would calculate the casket and judgment scenes of the "Merchant of Venice" by the every day probabilities of life. But, whilst we grant this indulgence to genius, if it be asked, whether we can extend it to indifferent talent, the answer must be, that we assuredly do not, and cannot. The romance of the fancy is a sunflower that will open itself only to Apollo. Whatever credit we give to inspired fiction is repaid to us with lavish interest: but our faith can have no dealings with dulness in affairs of the marvellous.

To return to Dodsley. I am no way surprised that the Drury Lane audience had no desire to see our great actress herself in "Cleone" beyond the second night. Even on that evening the boxes were observed to be almost deserted; and the reason assigned was, that she had affected the ladies too much at the former representation. It was said of Dr.

Duigenan that he had as strong an influence over the House of Commons as Grattan himself; for, if Grattan could fill the House, the other could at any time empty it. In the same manner, the author of "Cleone" might boast that he had called forth a perfectly new power in Mrs. Siddons's acting,—that of thinning her audiences.

1787. The next new part which she assumed was that of *Imogen*, in "Cymbeline."\* This play, one of the loveliest creations of Shakespeare's fancy, is, perhaps, the fittest in his whole theatre to illustrate the principle which I have just been pointing out, namely, that great dramatic genius can occasionally venture on bold improbabilities, and yet, not only shrieve the offence, but leave us enchanted with the offender. The wager of *Posthumus*, in "Cymbeline," is a very unlikely one. I certainly dislike that

---

\* Jan. 29, 1787. *Posthumus*, J. Kemble; *Iachimo*, Smith.



spirit of detraction which obviously pervades Mrs. Lennox's dissections of Shakespeare; but, really, when she puts the question, whether a noble-minded prince acts consistently in betting on his wife's chastity, I am at a loss how to answer her. Schlegel, the hieraphant of Shakespeare, admits that *Posthumus's* character is somewhat sacrificed for the sake of counterbalancing effect. Hazlitt avoids the question; and Mrs. Jameson apologises for the wager on the score of the *rude times*. There is so much anachronism in a play where British princes and Romans appear in one scene, and a French gentleman in another, that we are left with but vague conceptions of the suitable manners. But, in no age or state of manners would a sensible man have closed with *Iachimo's* challenge; and the more that we hear of *Posthumus* being such a creature,

“As to seek through the regions of the earth  
For one his like, there would be something failing  
In him that should compare,”

the more we wonder at his undignified bet.

Let us deal honestly with the objection; and admit the wager to be improbable. But still we have enough in the play to make us forget it, and more than forgive it. Shakespeare foresaw that, from this licence, he could deduce delightful scenes and situations; and he scrupled not to hazard it. The faulty incident may thus be compared to a little fountain, which, though impregnated with some unpalatable mineral, gives birth to a large stream, and that stream, as it proceeds, soon loses its taint of taste, in the sweet and many waters that join its course.

Be the wager what it may, it gives birth to charming incidents. It introduces us to a feast of the chastest luxury, in the sleeping scene, when we gaze on the shut eyelids of *Imogen*. And that scene (how ineffably rich as well as modest!) is followed by others, that swell our interest to enchantment. *Imogen's* character hallows to the imagination everything that loves her, and that she loves in return: and,

when she forgives *Posthumus*, who may dare to refuse him pardon? Then, in her friendship with her unconscious brothers of the mountain-cave, what delicious touches of romance! I think I exaggerate not, in saying that Shakespeare has nowhere breathed more pleasurable feelings over the mind, as an antidote to tragic pain, than in "Cymbeline." Yet, why do I doubt of my partiality to this tragedy of Shakespeare's being perfectly just? It is only because, among the masterpieces of Shakespeare—a pretty numerous class,—if I were asked which was my chief favourite, I should always be apt to answer, *That which I have last read.*

In the tragedy of "Cymbeline," we have a deep curiosity for *Imogen's* destiny; wonderfully sustained, at the same time, with a never-doubting hope. We see futurity in the story as through a richly-stained window, that hides the landscape, and yet glows with its light.

Mrs. Siddons was peculiarly happy in *Imogen*. She gave greatness to the character, without diminishing its gentleness. I believe that a feeling of rivalry with Mrs. Jordan was not quite unconcerned with her motives for wishing to play the part. In tragic acting, she had palpably defeated the Yates and the Crawford; and, though Miss Farren still shewed herself in the "Winter's Tale," as *Hermione*, she had no tragic popularity that could in the least alarm Mrs. Siddons. But Mrs. Jordan had admirers absurd enough to predict her greatness in tragedy; and she had played *Bellarion* and *Imogen*, with no small celebrity, in the preceding season. By acting *Imogen* only once, our great actress put a stop to Mrs. Jordan's competition with her on the graver stage. *Imogen*, having to repulse *Cloten*, and to rebuke *Iachimo*, requires not only sweetness, but dignity of demeanor. Of the latter princely quality the lovely and romping Mrs. Jordan had not a particle.\*

---

\* Mrs. Siddons had to play this character, during some of the scenes, in man's attire. From all that I can

On the 15th of March, she found a new character, in the *Hortensia* of Jephson's "Count of Narbonne."\* This tragedy is avowedly taken

---

collect, she was here more fortunate than in *Rosalind*. A letter of hers is now before me, which she wrote to Mr. Hamilton, the painter, just before she appeared in the part.

*"To Mr. Hamilton, Dean-street, Soho.*

"Mrs. Siddons presents her compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, and wishes them many happy returns of this joyous season (Christmas.) She hopes they will do her the favour to lay their commands upon her, at all times, when they are disposed to amuse themselves an hour or two at the theatre. She is very much afraid they have deserted poor Old Drury.

"Mrs. Siddons would be extremely obliged to Mr. Hamilton, if he would be so good as to make her a slight sketch for a boy's dress, to conceal the person as much as possible, as she was obliged to give the one he was so good as to make for *Rosalind* to Mrs. O'Neil, when she was last in Ireland. Mrs. Siddons soon hopes to bring the little folks to see their old friend. She expects them all this week. The dress is for *Imogen*, but Mrs. Siddons does not wish to have it known."

\* *Raymond*, Mr. Kemble; *Austin*, Bensley; *Theodore*, Bannister, jun.; *Adelaide*, Mrs. Crouch.

from Walpole's "Castle of Otranto;" though, of course, there is no preternatural agency represented on the stage. The hero of the play, like that of the romance, has inherited his estate from an unrighteous owner; and the curse of unexpiated blood hangs over his house. The heirs apparent successively die. The last of them perishes not, as in Walpole's romance, by the fall of a gigantic helmet, but by being thrown from his horse in the chase. He is not, like the heir of Otranto, a sickly weakling, but a noble and promising youth. The father's shock at losing him so abruptly, in the bloom of youth, is well described. He had mourned over his other sons, he says, but their sickness had slowly prepared him for losing them :

"I saw my lilies drooping, and, accustomed  
To see them dying, bore to see them dead."

Jephson is abundant in such touches of amenity; but this tragedy is weak as a whole, and

the part of *Hortensia*, the wife of the Count of Narbonne, was by no means worthy of Mrs. Siddons's powers.

A few days afterwards, March 29, for her brother's benefit, she acted *Lady Restless*, in Murphy's diverting comedy of "All in the Wrong."\* "Mrs. Siddons," says Boaden, "had as much bustle as the restless lady required, and spoke the dialogue naturally and skilfully, but the laugh excited was not of the hearty kind."

My own impression, the only time I ever saw her in comedy, which was at Edinburgh, and in the last century, was scarcely so favourable to her comic powers as that which Mr. Boaden here expresses; and I believe, at this moment, that it was correct. She played *Lady Townly*, I thought, with so marvellous

---

\* For Kemble's benefit. *Sir John Restless*, King; *Beverley*, Kemble: *Belinda*, Miss Farren.

a lack of airiness, that when I came to London, and had the honour of being introduced to her, a surprising addition to my pleasure in forming her acquaintance was, to find that she had a vast relish for humour, ay, and a fund of laughable anecdotes in conversation. In her own slow way, she told a comic story inimitably; and I have heard her read scenes in comedy with irresistible effect. The impression made by those readings, and my constant perception, during a long acquaintance, of a strong and *naïve* sense of humour in her character, by degrees led me to wonder how it was that nature had not fitted her to be ambidextrous on the stage. I was at one time, I must confess, almost a convert to the doctrine of my gifted friend Joanna Baillie, who still insists that nothing but unfair discouragement prevented Mrs. Siddons from being a great comic actress. My leaning towards this opinion, though I have at last abjured it, was increased by finding Oxberry, an ill-natured but rather shrewd



writer about theatricals, and himself an artist, somewhat an admirer of Mrs. Siddons in comedy. Mr. Godwin, a better authority, for whose friendly interest in the present work I owe my warmest acknowledgments, also spoke to me of the great felicity of her comic acting in the part of *Portia*; and he had the kindness to favour me, soon after our conversation, with the following note.

“ *New Palace Yard*;

“ *Friday Evening, Oct. 18, 1833.*

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ It struck me, after you left us, this morning, that I had answered your question respecting Mrs. Siddons’s performance of the character of *Portia*, in the “*Merchant of Venice*,” with more than my usual imperfectness and generality; and, as you flatter me by laying a stress on my opinion, I am desirous of supplying this defect.

“ I should say, therefore, that there was a most

striking fascination in her manner of exhibiting what she had to do in the fifth act. The scene is merely a light one, exhibiting the perplexity into which she throws *Bassanio*, by persisting that he had given his ring to a woman, and not to a man. This would appear almost nothing from a female of gamesome and rattling character, and would have made little impression. But Mrs. Siddons had a particular advantage, from the gravity of her general demeanour; and there was something inexpressibly delightful in beholding a woman of her general majesty condescend for once to become sportive. There was a marvellous grace in her mode of doing this; and her demure and queen-like smile, when, appearing to be most in earnest, she was really most in jest, gave her a loveliness, that it would be in vain for me to endeavour to find words to express.

“ Believe me, my dear sir,

“ Very faithfully yours,

“ WILLIAM GODWIN.”

I believe that Mr. Godwin, in the word *con-*  
*descend*, explains the secret of all Mrs. Siddons's  
limited power in comedy; for some power  
she certainly had, though it was not much.  
George Colman called her, in comedy, "a  
frisking Gog." Joanna Baillie and myself, less  
witty, but much more reverential towards the  
great actress, in our gratitude for her conde-  
scension to be mirthful, I have no doubt, exag-  
gerated her comic powers. I had something like  
a remaining doubt upon the subject, when, about  
a year ago, I waited on the famous comedian,  
Bannister, as an applicant for whatever recol-  
lections of the Siddons he could afford me. I  
am ashamed to say, that, idol as he is of my  
youthful recollections, I made thus late my per-  
sonal acquaintance with him. Bannister was  
certainly not the chief of convulsively droll  
actors; but he was, to my humble taste, some-  
thing better,—one who made you forget that  
you were looking at a play. He was pure  
hilarity, and plain English nature. Without a

trait of grimace on his comely countenance, he always came in as if he had been breathing the fresh air of the country, and he was more than an actor, by seeming to be no actor at all, but a gloriously pleasant fellow, helping you to enjoy a joke.

Bannister spoke of Mrs. Siddons with delightful enthusiasm. Her noble features, he remarked, though large enough to command attention at a distance, were animated by so constant an expression of good sense, that they kept up a respectful feeling still more strongly in the person who was acting with her on the stage, than in the far off spectator. A smile, he said, was not habitual to her; but, when it did mantle in her countenance, it came to the heart, not like the sunshine, that all could share, but as an individual and flattering compliment. Bannister had at first, I thought, a delicate reserve in touching on the subject of her talents for comedy, and suffered me, without contradic-

tion, to say, that surely some passages of her *Rosalind* must have been respectable; but, when I requested of his candour to tell me whether her comic acting had, in any character, or in the smallest degree, ever pleased him, he shook his head, and remarked, that the burthen of her inspiration was too weighty for comedy.\*

Very soon after her experiment as *Lady Restless*, the pen of Jephson furnished her with a new and original tragic character, in his play of “*Julia, or the Italian Lover.*” The genius

---

\* Bannister's anecdotes about himself more than repaid me for his refusal to praise the comedy of Mrs. Siddons. He began his own stage career in tragedy, and played the hero, in Voltaire's “*Mahomet.*” Garrick, who had trained him to the part, met him the next day, after he had acquired some applauses in *Mahomet*, and asked him, with his usual abundance of gesture and eh, ehs, what character he wished to play next. “Why,” said Bannister, “I was thinking of *Oroonoko.*” “Eh,” said David, staring at Bannister, who was at that time very thin, “you will look as much like *Oroonoko* as a

of that writer is just sufficient, in my mind, to excite a moderate partiality; but, I should do injustice to Jephson not to acknowledge, that his tragedy of "Julia," and particularly the trial scene, was good enough to give great scope to Mrs. Siddons's acting. The revengeful *Montevole*, in this play, is an Italian portrait of strong national verisimilitude.

The only other new part which she performed during this season was *Alicia*, in "Jane Shore." "Why," it will perhaps be asked, "did she

---

chimney-sweeper in a consumption." Bannister told me that, at these words of Garrick, his knees slackened, and he had almost sunk down on the pavement. At another interview, he ventured to tell the English Roscius that he had some thoughts of attempting comedy. "Eh, eh?" said Garrick, "why no, don't think of that, you may humbug the town for some time longer as a tragedian; *but comedy is a serious thing*, so don't try it yet." Bannister, however, attempted comedy; and his *Don Whiskerandos* (as he himself says) laughed his tragedy out of fashion.

relinquish the comparatively loveable character of *Shore's* wife, for that of the guilty wretch who betrays her?" The only answer I can give is, that, wretch as she is, *Alicia* is an impassioned being; and that none but players can duly estimate the craving of the public for new impressions from performers, or the difficulty of satisfying that avidity. A meritorious actor once told me, that no risk in a new part was so formidable as cloying the public with over-frequency in an old one. A player may recover from experimental damnation; but the world never forgives the infliction of satiety.

## CHAPTER V.



## CONTENTS.

Season at Drury Lane, 1787-1788—Mrs. Siddons appears as *Cordelia*, in “King Lear”—as *Cleonice*, in the “Fate of Sparta”—as *Katherine*, in “Katherine and Petruchio”—as *Dionara*, in Greatheed’s “Regent”—as *Cleopatra*, in Dryden’s “All for Love”—Visits Scotland—Was at Windsor when the King shewed the first Symptoms of his mental Malady.

## CHAPTER V.

1787. DURING the recess of 1787, Mrs. Siddons found her health so much affected by his efforts in the preceding season, that she forbore her customary visits to the provincial theatres, and spent the greater part of the summer at the hospitable mansion of her friend, Lady Harcourt.

In the autumn she returned to Old Drury; but I find her appearing in no new part till she acted *Cordelia*, to the *King Lear* of her brother, John Kemble.

Many are still alive who may remember them in these two characters. Their magnificent acting was always the more acceptable for

being conjoined on the stage ; though, when comparison was instituted, it leaned almost invariably in favour of the sister's genius. In this play, however, I believe I shall not contradict the general recollection of all surviving spectators, when I say that the brother was a more memorable player than the sister. I have certainly, in my own mind, a more vivid recollection of the Kemble's *Lear* than of the Siddons's *Cordelia*. The former, as *Lear*, was unparalleled among all the actors I ever beheld. Kean, with all his powers, I think, failed in the part as a whole. He absolutely lowered the tone of it, at times, to the whine of an aged beggar. Kemble, alone, was a touchingly pathetic old man, and, at the same time, "*every inch a King*."\* When he awoke, in *Cordelia's* lap, he

---

\* On the evening of the day that I wrote the above sentence I went to see, for the first time, Macready as *Lear*. I must own that I missed the *ὄσσε φαεινὰ*—the splendid eyes of Kemble, in the old king's appearance ; but still Macready's performance of *Lear* is that of a masterly actor.

gave his eyes an expression that seemed *inspired*, strangely blending the fire of a fervid mind with the lost look of age: and he made imbecility and dotage indescribably affecting.

As far as my own recollection goes, *Cordelia* was not one of the parts in which our great actress made a first-rate impression. Of course, I am now only comparing her with herself. Mrs. Siddons, I also remember, once talked to me of *Cordelia* being a secondary part, which she would not have performed, but for the benefit of her brother. This information will possibly surprise some of my readers, who have resorted to the page of Shakespeare oftener than to the theatre. "How strange it is," they will say, "that Mrs. Siddons should not have doated on the best of Shakespeare's female creations, and felt herself at home in the pathos and hallowedness of *his Cordelia*." Yes, the original heroine is a noble being, but Mrs. Siddons was not now playing Shakespeare's *Cordelia*.

I have my own doubts, indeed, whether the real Shakespearian *Cordelia*, beautiful as the character is, would have given great scope to Mrs. Siddons's powers, as the pious daughter of *Lear* appears in so few scenes of the tragedy. But, be that as it may, she was now playing a part compounded out of Shakespeare's poetry and the verses of Nahum Tate. In this edition of *Lear*, *Cordelia* is made to be in love with *Edgar*, and to receive him as a lover, with his blanket about him, reciting many of the wretched verses of the interpolating poet. I deny not that, in all the unhallowed changes of the tragedy, considerable scope was still left for her talents. The piece, though desecrated, had not lost all its original glory, "*nor seemed less than Archangel ruined.*" But still, the part of *Cordelia* was spoilt more than that of *Lear*, and to that circumstance I ascribe our great actress's *seeming* inferiority to her brother on this occasion.

The restorers of our stage, in Charles the Second's reign, brought forward the tragedy of "Lear," as it was originally written; but the public had not taste enough to enjoy it, even with Betterton's acting. In the leaden reign of King William, it was endured that Nahum Tate, the psalmist, should re-write "King Lear," or, to use his own audacious words, should "*new string the unpolished jewels of Shakespeare.*" He introduced a love-story between *Edgar* and *Cordelia*, and dismissed the audience in good humour, by making *Lear* and his pious daughter finally triumphant. Addison's pure taste protested against this change; and Richardson blames it, in his "*Clarissa*:" but still the public were so fond of the love-story, and the reprieve, that Garrick durst only make partial alterations on Tate's "Lear." He would not venture even to re-introduce the *Fool*, whom Nahum had banished, as if he had wished to have no other fool than himself concerned with the tragedy.

In 1768, the elder Colman brought out "Lear," at Covent Garden, strange to say, unsuccessfully, though he rescued the greater part of it from the profanations of Tate. He threw out the love scenes between *Edgar* and *Cordelia*, but was unhappily of Dr. Johnson's absurd opinion, that the heroine and her sire could not be dismissed without victory and felicity. With this exception, he adhered pretty fairly to Shakespeare.

The "King Lear" that was now brought forward, in January, 1788, I suppose, must have been Garrick's edition of the play. I make this conjecture, because Kemble was not Manager of Drury Lane until the October of the same year. But, be that as it may, I am sorry to confess that Kemble, when he became Manager, continued an edition of "Lear" upon the stage exceedingly discreditable to his taste, and retaining a great deal of the trash of Nahum Tate. In that vicious

edition of his, both he and Mrs. Siddons habitually acted.

Verily, if Shakespeare be the idol of England, he must be called our molten idol ;—we allow him to be cast into so many shapes, and to be adulterated with such base alloy.

On the last night of the same month of January, 1788, Mrs. Siddons had a new part, as *Cleonice*, in the “Fate of Sparta;” a tragedy so full of rant, that I marvel how she contrived to keep her audience in a state of gravity. Its authoress, Mrs. Cowley, could be respectable in comedy, but never out of it.

On the 13th of March, Mrs. Siddons performed, for her brother’s benefit, certainly not for her own, the part of *Katherine*, to his *Petruchio*.

She had a new part within a week after,



March 20, as *Dionara*, in the "Regent," a tragedy, by her friend, Bertie Greatheed, now the representative of that family with whom she had lived at Guy's Cliff. Her partiality for this production was naturally bespoken by her friendship for its author; at the same time, I am happy to find the "Regent" regarded rather favourably by judges more unlikely to be lenient. The *Biographia Britannica* allows it considerable merit.\* Mr. Genest also thinks it respectable, and commends the natural and simple language of its under characters. I knew Mr. Greatheed very well. He was a courageous Liberal, at a time when Liberalism was not so safe as at present; a practical philanthropist, and in every respect an estimable man. *Bonum virum facile dixeris*. But he was not a man of genius.

---

\* The *Biographia*, however, is wrong in stating that the "Regent" was acted only twice. It ran through twelve nights.

For her second benefit, this season, May 5, Mrs. Siddons performed *Cleopatra*, in Dryden's "All for Love."\* Already, I think, her professional history entitles us to regret that she was not oftener in Shakespeare: and who can forget that Shakespeare has given us a far superior tragedy to Dryden's on the same subject? Dryden's *Marc Antony* is a weak voluptuary from first to last. Not a sentence of manly virtue is ever uttered by him that seems to come from himself; and, whenever he expresses a moral feeling, it seems not to have grown up in his own nature, but to have been planted there by the influence of his friend, *Ventidius*, like a flower in a child's garden, only to wither and take no root. Shakespeare's *Antony* is a very different being. When he hears of the death of his first wife, *Fulvia*, his exclamation, "There's a great spirit gone!" and his reflec-

---

\* *Antony*, Kemble; *Ventidius*, Palmer; *Dolabella*, Barrymore: *Octavia*, Mrs. Ward.

tions on his own enthrallment by *Cleopatra*, mark the residue of a noble mind. An ordinary wanton could have enslaved Dryden's hero. A queen, a siren, an enchantress, alone, could have entangled the *Marc Antony* of Shakespeare, whose *Cleopatra* is equally superior to Dryden's.

And yet, would Shakespeare's *Cleopatra* have suited Mrs. Siddons's powers? I am pretty sure it would not. The energy of the heroine, though neither vulgar nor comic, has a meteoric playfulness and a subtle lubricity in the transition of feelings, that accords with no impression which can be recollected from Mrs. Siddons's acting.

A French critic calls Great Britain the island of the idolators of Shakespeare; yet it so happens, in this same island, that Dryden's "All for Love" has been acted ten times oftener than Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra."

But, because the heroine of the latter drama is a part that probably would not have suited Mrs. Siddons, it by no means follows that she was worthily employed, as the *Cleopatra* of the former. If Dryden's idea of confronting the Egyptian Queen with the wife of *Antony*, and bringing them almost to a scolding match, were not so injudicious, the part of the Roman Matron, *Octavia*, would have been more appropriate to the Siddons. As it was, she never established "*the Siren of the Nile*" among her popular characters.

This was her last appearance at Drury Lane for the season. She left town for Mr. Greatheed's, in Warwickshire, and spent several weeks there with her delighted friends. From thence she proceeded to the Northern provincial theatres. By Jackson's account of the Scottish stage, it appears that her profits at Edinburgh were far superior even to Mrs. Jordan's, and that in nine nights they amounted to as many hundred

pounds. At the conclusion of her engagement, the Faculty of Advocates presented her with a piece of plate, a massive silver tea-tray, bearing the following inscription :

“ TO MRS. SIDDONS,  
AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RESPECT FOR  
EMINENT VIRTUES,  
AND OF GRATITUDE FOR PLEASURE RECEIVED  
FROM UNRIVALLED TALENTS.”

The autumn of this year was memorable for the commencement of that first illness of his Majesty George III., by which the Regency question was brought into agitation. The reader will perhaps ask with surprise, what connexion Mrs. Siddons's name could have with the afflicting event of the Royal malady. It had only this connexion, that she was the first person who observed in the Royal personage grounds to suspect his mental aberration. The King, like all his subjects, thought her

talents an ornament to his reign, and he had a profound and cordial regard for her personal character. She was often at Buckingham House and at Windsor. But, when she was on a visit at the latter Palace, his Majesty one day handed her a sheet of paper, that was blank all but the signature of his name. She judged too highly both of her Sovereign and herself to believe that, in his right mind, he could shew such extraordinary conduct; and the event proved the justice of her conclusion. She immediately took the paper to the Queen, who was duly grateful for this dignified proof of her discretion.

At this period our great actress was the courted favourite of an intellectual circle, whose acquaintance made her prouder than even the notice of Royalty. Often have I heard her boast of the times when every other day she had a note or a visit from Sir Joshua Reynolds, from Mrs. Piozzi, or from Erskine,

Burke, Sheridan, or Malone. I fondly hoped to have found among her papers a good many relics of her correspondence with these distinguished cotemporaries, but, to my mortification, there were none, with the exception of one or two, which shall be given.

## CHAPTER VI.



## CONTENTS.

Season 1788-9—Mrs. Siddons's Health becomes infirm—  
She meets with a domestic Calamity—" Henry VIII."  
is brought out at Drury Lane—Her *Queen Katharine*  
—She plays *Volumnia*, in the Tragedy of " *Coriolanus*"  
—The *Princess*, in Jephson's " *Lombardy*;" and  
Shakespeare's *Juliet*.

## CHAPTER VI.

1788.  
~

AND yet, in those halcyon days of her ripened fame and meridian beauty, I find that her health was beginning to suffer by her professional fatigues ; for, though her reputation could not well be augmented, it could not be supported without incessant exertion. The daily Papers of this period frequently allude to her illness ; and, in the season 1788-9, she performed less frequently by twenty nights than in any preceding year, at Drury Lane. It was no trifling indisposition that could make Mrs. Siddons relax one day from her professional duty. Never was there any one more above

the littleness of either fancying or feigning indisposition. With a family consisting chiefly of daughters, she was too affectionate a mother not to be anxious for the gains that were to secure their independence; neither was she unambitious of continuing her celebrity. Accordingly, she prided herself on her professional industry. I have heard her boast that she never once disappointed either a Manager or the public; and that, in point of punctuality, she had always been *an honest actress*.

But her health was tried at this time not only by the toils of her vocation, but by "*the grief that passeth speaking*;" for, though Death had not yet made his greatest ravages in her family, she lost, this year, a little daughter, in the bloom of infancy.

During this season, however, she assumed two of her most signal new characters. On the

25th of November, 1788, Shakespeare's "Henry VIII." after an absence of half a century, was brought forward at Drury Lane, with costly dresses and decorations, and with studious pains on the part of the Managers. Palmer was *King Henry*, John Kemble was *Cromwell*, and Bensley was *Cardinal Wolsey*. Our great actress, as if to shew that Dr. Johnson's old words had not slept in her ear, took the part of *Queen Katharine*. This was an era, not only in Mrs. Siddons's history, but in the fortune of the play as an acting piece ; for certainly, in the history of all female performance on the British stage, there is no specific tradition of any excellence at all approaching to hers as *Queen Katharine*.

I cannot help imagining that there was a strong moral resemblance between the historical heroine and her illustrious representative. They were both benevolent, great, simple, and straightforward in their integrity ; strong and

sure, but not prompt in intellect ; both religiously humble, yet punctiliously proud. It is true that Hans Holbein paints Henry's consort, and the old English chroniclers also describe her, as much less beautiful than they would have painted and described Mrs. Siddons ; but who that meets *Queen Katharine*, in Shakespeare, troubles himself about Hans Holbein and the old chroniclers ? We wish and fancy her to be superb ; and we see her visage in her mind.

It seems to be considered as almost certain that the play of "Henry VIII." was brought out in the reign of Elizabeth, and that it was acted before her Majesty by her own command. This fact is remarkable, and, at a first and superficial view, it may seem even astonishing,—when we ask how Anna Boleyn's daughter should have desired to look on the stage-death of *Queen Katharine*, in connexion with the representation of her own mother, whose tragic

fate must have been silently in the mind of every spectator.

I have found it repeatedly remarked, that there is a wonderful boldness and dexterity in Shakespeare's management of this subject; and his adroitness I can readily recognise. But, with regard to his boldness, we may rest assured that he inserted not one word in the drama which would hazard, much less defy Queen Elizabeth's displeasure: and his address seems to have consisted, principally, in flattering his Royal Mistress upon no points where the public opinion could not palpably go with him, and where his plain dealing was not a better compliment to her shrewd mind than the subtlest perversion of facts would have been. For instance, the nation perfectly well knew that Henry's only motive for divorcing Katharine was his love of Anna Boleyn; and Shakespeare makes one of his characters jocosely tell us so. If the poet had hypocritically

treated Hal's scruples with respect, Elizabeth would have chidden him for absurd adulation. But Shakespeare keeps Henry VIII. and her mother not only in a true light, but in that exact degree of exposure to the true light which was most favourable to Elizabeth's popularity. Her father is not libelled on the stage. What with a remnant of regard that he shows to Kate, the Queen of Queens, and his old English bluntness, not unmixed with a certain portion of jocularitv, we cannot be said to hate him thoroughly, however secretly we may condemn him ; at least, our dislike of him is kept at a moderate temperature. Shakespeare is equally dexterous, in making *Anna Boleyn* gentle and compassionate towards *Queen Katharine* ; and I think he plays the courtier a little, in contriving to exculpate *Anna* at the expense of *Wolsey*.

But it may be asked, if it was not weakening our interest in Elizabeth's mother, to make us

weep over the heart-broken death of Katharine? I answer, No! for Anna Boleyn's execution was still more fresh in the public recollection than Queen Katharine's death; and the unmerited sufferings of the former could only tend to strengthen in the public breast their conviction of Anna Boleyn having died undeservedly. It is true, Henry VIII. is not libelled in Shakespeare's drama, yet his fickleness is so fully exposed, as to make us say to ourselves, if the tyrant could thus atrociously use the noble Katharine, can we harbour the slightest doubts of Anna Boleyn's innocence? Elizabeth, therefore, witnessed in this play scenes that indirectly, but powerfully vindicated her own mother; and, on the day that she saw it represented, there was not in the whole House a more politic player than the Royal spectatress.

Here Mrs. Siddons found a part in which she could promise herself continued popularity, even under increasing years. I cannot say, from



my own observation, whether she improved or not in her performance of *Queen Katharine*, but she used to pride herself in having done so in all her great characters; and I cannot suppose her to have been self-deceived.

I should say something of my remembrance of her *Queen Katharine*, if I had not beside me some remarks, that will be incomparably more than a substitute for any that I could offer. They were printed by my friend, James Ballantyne, of Edinburgh, and, I have reason to believe, were written by the actor Terry. They have to me the apparent stamp of a stage-artist.

“ *Katharine of Arragon*, the wife and the daughter of a King;—majestic alike in her birth, her demeanour, her virtues, and her understanding;—the ready defender of the oppressed, and the stedfast enemy of the oppressor;—the dignified assertor of her own honour,

and the strict and affectionate guardian of that of others entrusted to her care;—the kind and benevolent friend of the humble, and the self-corrected, patient, and religious supporter of worldly sufferings and persecutions:—such is *Katharine*, as drawn by Shakespeare, and exhibited to the life by Mrs. Siddons.

“In the chamber-council, met for the examination of the *Duke of Buckingham's* surveyor, she is first introduced to us, as the humane petitioner, on the part of the people, against the ambitious and extortionate rapacity of *Wolsey*, of whose selfish politics she throughout shows herself the undaunted opposer; and as the advocate of *Buckingham*, against the insidiousness of his prosecutor, and the treachery of his surveyor. This is a quiet scene, affording no opportunities for energetic exertions, or flashes of effect, but displaying those excellencies which Mrs. Siddons alone possesses,—that quiet majesty of deportment, arising from the

natural majesty of her form and mind, which imposes reverence and commands subjection; and that clear and intelligent harmony of unlaboured elocution, which unravels all the intricacies of language, illuminates obscurity, and points and unfolds the precise truth of meaning to every apprehension. This unrivalled excellence was illustrated in every speech of the scene. But we feel a pleasure in recalling particular remembrance to the awful and impressive dignity of appeal,—to the searching solemnity of her tone and manner, when she interrupts the wretched instrument of *Wolsey*, in his tutored charge against his master, *Buckingham* :

‘If I know you well,  
You were the Duke’s surveyor, and lost your office  
On the complaint o’ the tenants. Take good heed  
You charge not in your spleen a noble person,  
And spoil your nobler soul. I say, take heed!’

The insensibility of brutal apathy, or demoniac determination of evil, could alone have remain-

ed unalarmed and unchanged before the still, but tremendous force of her voice and eye, as she uttered these lines.\*

“ In the trial scene, the same exquisite truth of elocution marked the sorrowful, affectionate, and dignified address to her husband. But we dwell with the strongest admiration upon the extraordinary sublimity of her feelings and ex-

---

\* I was at Edinburgh one year when she was electrifying the Northern metropolis with many characters, and with none more than this. One of her fellow-performers, Mr. Russell, told me an instance of her power in the part. A poor fellow who played the *Surveyor*, in “ Henry VIII.” was met by Mr. Russell coming off the stage, having just received the *Queen Katharine’s* (Siddons’s) rebuke, “ *You were the Duke’s surveyor, and lost your office on the complaint o’ the tenants.*” The mimetic unjust steward was perspiring with agitation. “ What is the matter with you ?” said Mr. Russell. “ The matter !” quoth the other, “ that woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked on me so through and through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again.”

pressions, when *Wolsey* opposes her request of delay until she may have the advice of her friends in Spain. Vexed to the uttermost by the artifices with which her ruin is prosecuted, and touched with indignation at the meanness and injustice of the proceedings, she interrupts *Campeius*, with the intention of accusing *Wolsey* of personal enmity towards her, and of refusing him for her judge, and calls, in a resistless tone of command, 'Lord Cardinal!' *Campeius*, who has been urging immediate trial, imagines it addressed to him, and comes forward as if to answer. Here Mrs. Siddons exhibited one of those unequalled pieces of acting by which she assists the barrenness of the text, and fills up the meaning of the scene. Those who have seen it will never forget it: but to those who have not, we feel it impossible to describe the majestic self-correction of the petulance and vexation which, in her perturbed state of mind, she feels at the misapprehension of *Campeius*, and the intelligent expression of

countenance and gracious dignity of gesture with which she intimates to him his mistake, and dismisses him again to his seat. And no language can possibly convey a picture of her immediate re-assumption of the fulness of majesty, glowing with scorn, contempt, anger, and the terrific pride of innocence, when she turns round to *Wolsey*, and exclaims, "To you I speak!" Her form seems to expand, and her eye to burn with a fire beyond human. *Wolsey* obeys the summons, and requests to know her pleasure: she proceeds to make her charge and her refusal. And we cannot refrain from quoting the following passages, for the purpose of remarking that the mingled feelings of which they are composed, their natural gradations, their quick and violent transitions, are all unfolded and expressed with such matchless perfection of ease and truth, and in colours so far exceeding in force and brilliancy those of every other performer, that the learned and unlearned, the vulgar and the refined, feel alike

the instantaneous conviction of their superiority, and the impossibility of adapting praise expressive of their own conceptions and adequate to her deserts.

*Wolsey.*

‘Your pleasure, madam?’

*Queen.*

‘Sir!

I am about to weep: but thinking that  
We are a queen, or long have dream’d so,—certain  
The daughter of a king,—my drops of tears  
I’ll turn to sparks of fire!’

“There were none who did not feel the agonies of sympathy when they saw her efforts to suppress the grief to which her woman’s nature was yielding,—who did not acknowledge, in her manner, the truth of her assertion of Royalty, and who did not experience a portion of that awe which *Wolsey* might be supposed to feel when her ‘sparks of fire’ darted through her ‘drops of tears.’

“Every line of the subsequent reply to *Wolsey*, who entreats her to ‘be patient,’ exhibited the perfection of appropriate expression :

‘ I will, when you are humble,—nay, before ;  
Or God will punish me. I do believe,  
Induced by potent circumstances, that  
You are mine enemy ; and make my challenge  
You shall not be my judge : for it is you  
Have blown this coal betwixt my lord and me,  
Which heaven’s dew quench ! Therefore, I say again,  
I utterly abhor,—yea, from my soul,  
Refuse you for my judge ! whom, yet once more,  
I hold my most malicious foe, and think not  
At all a friend to truth !’

“ The withering poignancy of her scorn, and the deep solemnity of her reproach, made awful by the agitations of her soul, render vain our attempts either of description or of eulogy.

“ When the wiles of the arrogant politician overpower the simple honesty of her feelings, and “vex her past her patience;” and when she quits the court, saying

‘ I will not tarry !—no, nor ever more



Upon this business my appearance make  
In any of their courts !'

every spectator starts into sympathy with  
*Henry's* blunt exclamation, at her departure,

'Go thy ways, Kate ;  
Thou art alone the Queen of earthly Queens !'

"We are now brought to what we do not hesitate to believe the most entirely faultless specimen of the art that any age ever witnessed : we mean the last scene of *Katharine's* sickness and approaching death. We are, in general, subjected to severe disappointment by the attempts of art to embody the portraiture of ideal excellence which imagination has previously raised : but, in this instance, its most soaring conceptions are equalled, we will venture to say surpassed, by the extraordinary powers of Mrs. Siddons. Her empire over the regions of tragedy is unlimited ;—her potency of terror and of woe are equal : and the tremendous pencil of Michael Angelo, which we

have seen her wield with such force, in *Lady Macbeth*, *Constance*, and others, is here resigned for the sublime and pathetic simplicity of Raphael's touches,—so saintedly beauteous is the sickness and the grief of *Katharine*.

“ There is one feature of her delineation of the sickness unto death, which struck us as a remarkable indication of the superiority of her observations of nature, and her skill in the representation. Instead of that motionless languor, and monotonous imbecility of action and countenance, with which the common-place stage-pictures of sickness are given, Mrs. Siddons, with a curious perception of truth and nature peculiarly her own, displayed, through her feeble and falling frame, and death-stricken expression of features, that morbid fretfulness of look, that restless desire of changing place and position, which frequently attends our last decay. With impatient solicitude, she sought relief from the irritability of illness by

the often shifting her situation in her chair; having the pillows on which she reposed her head every now and then removed and adjusted; bending forward, and sustaining herself, while speaking, by the pressure of her hands upon her knees; and playing, during discourse, amongst her drapery with restless and uneasy fingers: and all this with such delicacy and such effect combined, as gave a most beautiful as well as most affecting portraiture of nature fast approaching to its exit.

“ To select passages from this scene for particular admiration would be idle, where the whole so strongly calls for the revived attention of the mind, to examine and reflect upon the minute and watchful skill by which every part was made to conduce to that wondrous general impression received while witnessing the performance. Yet, perhaps, those little touches which mark and preserve individuality of character start off in the strongest light of

remembrance : such as the indignant reproof with which she chides the rude and irreverent entrance of the messenger, and shows that, in her dejected state, “ she will not lose her wonted greatness ;” and the peculiar moral sweetness and royalty of manner with which she makes her last request :

‘ When I am dead,  
Let me be us’d with honour. Strew me over  
With maiden flowers, that all the world may know  
I was a chaste wife unto my grave !  
Although unqueen’d, inter me like a queen ;  
And pay respect to that which I have been.’

“ One additional beauty of her performance remains for us to notice,—the astonishing nicety with which her powers are made gradually to decay from the beginning to the end of the scene ; when her anxious directions to the *Lord Campeius* seem to have exhausted her ; when “ her eyes grow dim,” and her bodily and mental powers but just suffice, as she is supported off, to lay upon her servants the

last pathetic and solemn injunctions we have quoted.

“The oppressive truth of her representation, in this scene, is remarkably indicated by the minds of the audience being always so weighed down with the load of sorrow, tenderness, and respect, that it is not until she is no more seen, and reflection has relieved them from their sensations, that they ever once think of paying the customary tribute of applause, which then cannot be too long and loud : but, in the course of the scene, the heart cannot once yield to, or suffer the usual theatrical sympathy of the hands.”

On the 7th of February following she played, for the first time, *Volumnia*,\* in Shakespeare's

---

\* *Coriolanus*, Kemble; *Tullus Aufidius*, Wroughton; *Menenius*, Baddely; *Comminius*, J. Aickin; *Tribunes*, Barrymore and Whitfield; *Citizens*, Suett, &c. *Virgilia*, Mrs. Farmer; *Valeria*, Mrs. Ward.

“*Coriolanus*,” adapted to the stage, with additions from Thomson! Shakespeare, with additions from Thomson! With subtractions, they ought surely to have said; for, much as we may all love the latter poet, what could his drama add to that of Shakespeare? and, of all Shakespeare’s plays, the pure original “*Coriolanus*,” in my humble opinion, needs the smallest alteration for the stage. I know not whether Brinsley Sheridan or John Kemble was the compounder of this mixed piece, as Mrs. Siddons first performed in it, but, as the latter was now the acting Manager of Drury Lane, I rather suspect him to have got it up; and I believe that it was the same that was afterwards published from his Prompt-book.

So delightful is the impression which I retain of the Kemble’s and the Siddons’s performances in this tragedy, altered as it was from the noble and true text, and such recollections of their confronted aspects, as *Coriolanus* and *Volumnia*,

come across my mind, that I reluctantly criticise the taste of the great actor, in his alterations of Shakespeare. As performers, the brother and sister were perfect samples of the heroic form and of heroic action; and, whilst they trode the stage, the delighted spectator was willing to forget that the piece contained those mis-named additions from Thomson. Kemble made *Coriolanus* one of his noblest parts. But, when I calmly compare Kemble's Prompt-book tragedy with the text of Shakespeare, I cannot but wonder at his innovations, as a stage-compositor.

Thus much, however, may be said in palliation of Kemble's production; that for the most part he adheres to Shakespeare, and that the liberties which he took with the original were far inferior to those which had been formerly taken with it. It is a fact, surprising as it may seem, that the real Shakespearian "*Coriolanus*" has rarely, if ever, been acted on the British

stage since the Restoration. I pretend to no authority as an inquirer into our theatrical history, but, under eventual correction, I venture to state my belief, that it was never acted genuinely from the year 1660 till the year 1820.

During this long interval, nevertheless, "Coriolanus" was not forgotten. The enlightened public, in 1682, permitted Nahum Tate, the executioner of King David, to *correct* the plays of Shakespeare; and he laid his hangman hands on "Coriolanus." He made *Valeria* a prattling and rattling lady. *Aufidius* threatens to violate *Virgilia* before her husband's face. *Nigridius* boasts that he has racked young *Marcus*, the son of *Coriolanus*, and that he had thrown him, with all his limbs broken, into the arms of *Volumnia*; and she, his grandmother, soon enters, *mad*, with the pretty mangled boy in her arms. This mode of re-writing Shakespeare was for the time



being called correcting him. We talk of the barbarism of the Russians, because they occasionally take out the image of their patron saint, and correct him soundly, by flogging him for a long continuance of unseasonable weather; but, really, such treatment of Shakespeare was more sacrilegious.

A farther outrage still awaited the same tragedy, when Dennis moulded a portion of it, with wretched matter of his own, into a new piece, which he called "The Invader of his Country." It must be owned, however, that Dennis's drama was never tolerated.

Thomson's "Coriolanus," which appeared in 1748, had at least the merit of being a new and independent tragedy. The elder Sheridan, in 1764, brought out, at Covent Garden, a piece, in which he jumbled together the "Coriolanus" of Shakespeare with that of Thomson. Then, in 1789, came the Kemble edition, in which

so much of Thomson's absurdity is still preserved, that the stately *Volumnia* threatens to stab herself.

Mrs. Siddons, in spite of a few departures in her part from that in Shakespeare, was a magnificent *Volumnia*. I transcribe with pleasure the following recollection of her in that part, from a letter of my valued friend, the actor Young.—“I remember her,” he says, “coming down the stage in the triumphal entry of her son, *Coriolanus*, when her dumb-shew drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion,) from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eye, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eye from her. *Coriolanus*,

1789. banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had walked to her place."

On the 18th of the same month she had a new character, in the *Princess* of Jephson's "Law of Lombardy;" a very moderate tragedy, the story of which is taken from Ariosto. But she was not here destined to shew the miracle of drawing sublime acting from indifferent poetry, and the part never became one of her principals.

A still humbler piece taxed her powers soon afterwards, (March 20th), in the Hon. Mr. John St. John's "Mary Queen of Scots." Unfortunate Mary! the historians distract us about her memory, and the bad poets will not let her alone.

It is with something like a startled feeling that I find Mrs. Siddons, for her second benefit this season, choosing the part of Shakespeare's

*Juliet*. Fourteen years before, Garrick ought to have brought her out in this character, which would have then completely suited the youthful loveliness of her intelligent physiognomy. *Juliet*, with Mr. Boaden's permission, is not, as he calls her, in his *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, "*a silly girl*," but a shrewd and precociously strong-minded woman. She is blinded indeed by her love, because the passions, though they reason admirably about the means of being gratified, are miserable logicians as to the consequences of their own gratification. Mrs. Siddons, in her youth, would assuredly have been the best of *Juliets*; but how far she played it to perfection at this time, I can only conjecture. She was now thirty-four years of age; and time and study had stamped her countenance, one would imagine, too strongly for *Juliet*. Yet, Mr. Boaden says, that in her humouring of the *Nurse* there was something of a more genuine playfulness than he had ever heard before. This reminds me of what

I have already stated, on my own strong recollection, that in the scene of "Othello," where she pleaded as *Desdemona* for *Cassio*, there was a fondness, most beautifully familiar, in Mrs. Siddons's acting, which succeeding actresses have generally attempted to imitate. Let it be marked, that, to grant her this power of softening tragedy by a condescension to what might almost be called playfulness, is not to claim for her any genius for broad comedy.

On the whole, I believe, that in performing *Juliet*, in her thirty-fourth year, she played the true woman, wishing to make herself as loveable as possible to the last. Twice in the season she performed the less ambitious task of reciting on the stage a gossamery ode of the Della Cruscan poet, Merry, on the King's recovery.

## CHAPTER VII. ,

VOL. II.

M

## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons retires for a Season, but returns after the lapse of a Year — Plays *Queen Elizabeth*, in "Richard the Third," and *Mrs. Oakley*, in the "Jealous Wife."

## CHAPTER VII.

It was generally anticipated that John Kemble's appointment to be the Stage-manager of Drury Lane would have strengthened Mrs. Siddons's connexion with that house; but he had been only a season in office when she retired from it, and would accept of no engagement for the year 1789-90. Mr. Boaden thinks that this secession denoted some degree of misunderstanding with her brother; but there is not the slightest ground for such a suspicion. I know, from the best authority, that she laid the blame of her retirement on nobody but Richard Brinsley Sheridan. That accomplished gentleman still contrived to be the Purse-manager of Drury Lane; and to get money out of his hands was known to be a forlorn hope in the



stratagetics of dunning. Our actress's health, though very fragile, still permitted her to perform at some of the provincial theatres; but in these she had less excitement and exertion than on the London stage, on which, I have heard her say, she never entered without nervousness. It was rather too much to suffer the additional fear of non-payment.

In the November, 1789, I find that she was at Bath, and assisted, as the French phrase it, though only as a spectator, at the performance of a tragedy, which may well be called a curiosity in our literature, namely, that of "Earl Godwin," by Anne Yearsley, a poor woman who literally sold milk from door to door. That the tragedy should be a great or a good one, was hardly to be expected from a mind utterly destitute of culture,—for our heaven-taught ploughman, Burns, was an accomplished scholar in comparison with Anne Yearsley. I have searched in vain in London for a copy of "The

Earl of Godwin," and therefore cannot speak of it from my own perusal ; but, from circumstances and the testimony of others, I conclude that it is very indifferent. At the same time, the mere construction of a drama, that could bear to be acted, by so illiterate a writer, strikes me with the same sort of feeling as when I read of Ferguson, whilst he was a shepherd's boy, constructing a clock, although it was but an imperfect one. The poor milkwoman's genius is compared to Burns's by Anna Seward, with all the gilt brass of her consequential style ; but it will bear no comparison. The Bristol poetess's fancy, to judge from her occasional poems, seems to have grown up in the gloom of misery, like vegetation in the damps of a cellar. In one of them, she alludes to a dreadful scene of her real history. She was a married woman ; and, when about to be delivered of her sixth child, she and her babes, and her aged mother, were left without a morsel to eat, and on the brink of perishing. A humane visitant came at last to relieve them.

They all revived except her old mother : she could have borne famine a little longer, but the shock of relief instantaneously killed her : she raised her head to bless their benefactor, and expired.

In the course of this year Mrs. Siddons also visited Birmingham. In that city she one day chanced to be making some purchases in a shop where the busts of distinguished personages were sold. The shopman, unconscious who his customer was, took down a bust of herself, and told her that it was the likeness of the greatest and most beautiful actress that was ever seen in the world. Mrs. Siddons purchased the piece of stucco with a totally opposite opinion to the shopman's, respecting the merit of the sculpture. She thought that, though she had never tried modelling, she could make a better likeness of herself than this wretched production ; and from that time modelling in clay became her favourite

amusement. This circumstance led her to study statuary; and I have no doubt was beneficial to her taste in drapery and attitude. At the same time, I distinctly remember her telling me that her predilection for the classic costume was anterior to this period, and that one evening, in the second season of her acting at Drury Lane, when she had dismissed the fashionable curls and lappets, Sir Joshua Reynolds came up to her, after the play, and rapturously praised the round apple form which she had given to her head.

In the summer of 1790, Mrs. Siddons went, with her husband, to France, where they placed their daughters, Sarah and Maria, at a boarding-school at Calais. They then made a tour into the Netherlands, as far as Lisle, in which they were accompanied by Miss Wynne, who was afterwards Lady Percival.

By solicitation, and promises of punctual

remuneration, she was induced to return to Drury Lane, at the end of 1790. In welcoming her re-appearance the house was crowded to suffocation, and the tumultuous shouting and clapping lasted for full five minutes.\* The unconfirmed state of her health, however, was obvious to general observation. The *Morning Chronicle* for March 22, 1791, says, that "the preceding evening a most splendid house welcomed the incomparable actress, in *Jane Shore*. The languor of indisposition," it is added, "was visible in her countenance; but this languor gave a deeper interest to the illusion, by making it more perfect, for it was suited to the distress of the penitent, and never did we see her sufferings more chastely, more calmly, and more impressively delineated." She had strength to perform only seven nights during the season, and in no new character. On the last of these nights she charitably played for the benefit of

---

\* *London Chronicle*, 8th December, 1790.

the Theatrical Fund. The pit was laid into the boxes, and tickets were sold at a guinea each.

The state of her health disabled her, during the ensuing recess, from acting at any of the provincial theatres. She spent the summer at Newnham Rectory, the abode of her friend, Dr. Whalley,\* and at Guy's Cliff, with the Greatheeds. Towards Christmas she went to Harrogate in a very serious state of ailment. It was even doubtful, for some weeks, whether she would be able in the spring to rejoin her friends at Old Drury.

In the meantime those friends were obliged to make a temporary change in their place of acting. The house in Drury Lane was condemned, and pulled down in the summer of 1791. Mr. Genest says that, though many

---

\* Dr. Whalley wrote the "Castle of Montval," a tragedy, which was acted several years afterwards.

1792. alterations had been made, no new building  
had been raised on the spot for 100 years.  
The new edifice, which has since been burnt,  
was not finished till 1794. In the interim, the  
company performed at the Opera House, in the  
Haymarket, or, as it was called, the King's  
Theatre. The boxes were raised to 6*s.* and  
the pit to 3*s.* 6*d.*

Sheridan was no lover of tragedy, and, on  
Mrs. Siddons's late secession, he was accused  
of having boasted that, by the strength of  
comedy, Drury Lane would get on without her.  
His company had undoubtedly great comic  
force, for it included Bannister, jun., Palmer,  
Parsons, Moody, and Wewitzer; besides the  
enchancing Mrs. Jordan, and Miss Farren.  
But it was soon found that all this constellation  
of gaiety would not solace the public for the  
absent star. Her return for the winter of 1792  
was therefore anxiously expected. Her health  
happily permitted her, on the 21st of January,

to act at the Haymarket, where, in the course of the ensuing season, she performed two and twenty times, and in sixteen different characters. Among these, however, there was no one that was new to her, excepting that of *Queen Elizabeth*, in "Richard the Third," a part which, even in the original drama, is not of primary interest.

It is a fact not universally known, that the tragedy which was played on all our stages, since the year 1700 till some twelve years ago, was not the text of Shakespeare, but a fabrication got up by Cibber, partly out of the original, partly out of passages from other plays of Shakespeare, and partly out of materials from the brain of Colley himself. It was the fashion in the last century to admire this dramatic patchwork; and both Davies and Garrick commend it warmly. But critical opinion has of late run quite the contrary way; and Cibber is now rated like an intruding



cur, for leaving the vermin of his verse in the sacred precincts of Shakespeare.

Before we condemn Cibber, let us conceive, if he had the power of speaking for himself, what he would be likely to allege. The lively old gentleman, I imagine, would say, " You are now pleased to be very angry with me, for what it is the fashion to call my botching of ' Richard the Third ;' but, remember that scarcely any of Shakespeare's tragedies were kept on the stage without material alterations. In the days of Betterton, all the powers of that great actor could not give stage popularity to ' Richard the Third,' as it was written by Shakespeare. I did not create the taste of my time, I only followed and obeyed it. I launched on the stage a composite work, in which I preserved a good deal of the original, and borrowed largely from some other dramas of the divine poet. True it is, I added some of my own composition, which you angrily denominate

stuff. But, with all this stuff, my edition of 'Richard the Third' kept possession of the English stage *for an hundred and twenty years*. Many a writer of the eighteenth century quoted my interpolations as the pure poetry of Shakespeare, nor was it ever detected by one among myriads of his readers; and tens of myriads of spectators have gone home from seeing my fabrication of the tragedy, quoting passages of my stuff, and blessing Providence for adorning these islands with such a genius as Shakespeare's. In 1741, your immortal Garrick came out at Goodman's Fields; and which of the copies of the tragedy did he prefer? Why mine, and not Shakespeare's. The very line which put the first seal upon Garrick's celebrity, by the thunder of applause which followed it, 'Off with his head! so much for Buckingham!' that line was one of my interpolations. Garrick, Kemble, Cooke, and Kean, gained immense admiration in the tragedy such as I presented it.

“ And, after all, when you were determined, some years ago, to have the genuine play of Shakespeare restored to the stage, how did the attempt succeed ? It was acted twice at Covent Garden, and then laid aside.”

To speak impartially, I think, if Cibber committed sacrilege on Shakespeare, the British public, for more than a century, was an accomplice after the fact. All this time are we to let Shakespeare himself go scot-free from blame for a tragedy, which has so far a token of unfitness for the stage, that Cibber's alteration could displace it ? But the general necessity for curtailing Shakespeare's tragedies is, in reality, no reproach to him. If his plays had their old and undegenerate audiences, they would never seem too long for representation. They must now be abbreviated, because the playgoer insists on having two dramas in one night.

But the abbreviation of a Shakespearian drama is a task of some difficulty. When "Richard the Third" was restored, in 1821, it was confessed that omissions had been made, and that extraneous matter would still be introduced, in order to cement the parts disjointed by those omissions. But how was this task performed in 1821? Mr. Genest attributes the cold reception of the (almost) genuine "Richard the Third" to an actor making a ludicrous exit as the *Bishop of Ely*, and to the public not having been prepared by observations in the newspapers. I suspect that the cause lay deeper; namely, in the want of the *callida junctura* between omissions, and in the faultiness of the abridgment itself.

Mrs. Siddons made her last appearance this season in the comic part of the "Jealous Wife," *Mrs. Oakley*. I find it generally said, that she played the character *judiciously*; though

between that merit and excellence there is a mighty chasm.

In the personal history of Mrs. Siddons I may notice, that this year she gave, for the last time, her advice to her eldest son, Henry, not to adopt the stage for his profession. Many a time have I heard him bitterly repent his not having followed her counsel. Henry was educated at the Charter House, and might have been elected, if he had wished it, from thence to the University. But he thought highly of his capacities for acting, and decided on making it his profession. His mother, consenting reluctantly, sent him to Paris, to study French, and to see Le Kain.

## CHAPTER VIII.

VOL. II.

N

## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mr. Taylor, on his Offer to write her Biography—Re-opening of Drury Lane—An Innovation in the acting of "Macbeth"—She acts the *Countess Orsina*, in Lessing's Tragedy of "Emilia Galotti"—*Horatia*, in Whitehead's "Roman Father"—*Elvira*, in Miss Burney's unfortunate Drama—*Palmira*, in "Mahomet"—*Emmeline*, in "Edgar and Evelina"—*Roxana*, in "Alexander the Great"—*Julia*, in "Prince Hoare's Tragedy of "Such Things Were"—*Almeyda*, in the "Queen of Granada"—Escapes acting in "Vortigern"—She is disappointed in Money Matters by Sheridan; but returns to Drury Lane, in September, 1796—Takes a new Character, in Thomson's "Edward and Eleanora"—Acts *Vitellia*, in Jephson's "Conspiracy"—*Milwood*, in "George Barnwell"—*Athenais*, in "Theodosius; or, the Force of Love"—*Agnes*, in "Fatal Curiosity."

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE late Mr. John Taylor, author of the facetious story of Monsieur Tonson, was among the most intimate of Mrs. Siddons's friends, and was at this time one of her most frequent correspondents. As this worthy man's Recollections of his own Life have been published, and are well known, it will be unnecessary for me to give any particular account of him. He had the most extensive acquaintance, perhaps, of any man of the age. He either knew everybody, or something about everybody. He was without gall; and his harmless pleasantry, his vast fund of anecdote, and obliging disposition, made him more popular than more talented



men with less benevolent tempers. I saw much of him in his extreme old age—when he was still entertaining and cheerful; though he now and then complained of neglect from those who had known him in his palmier days, and compared himself, I fear with some justice, to the hare with many friends.

Among the letters of Mrs. Siddons, which Mr. Taylor put into my hands, a few months before his death, I find an answer to one of his own, from which it appears that he had offered to the great actress to be her biographer, but that she declined wearing the additional wreath with which his kind zeal aspired to crown her celebrity.

*“Newnham Rectory; August 5, 1793.*

“Indeed, my dear friend, if you were to write my praises with the pen of men and angels, I should shrink from that celebrity which the partiality of so kind a biographer

would confer: for how could I read without blushes those accounts of myself, which would be measures of his friendship, not standards of my worthiness. I am content that you should deceive yourself about my talents and my character, because I have an interest, and perhaps a livelier interest than most people, I believe, imagine, for the opinion of those who give themselves the trouble to think of me at all. But my friends in general are very much mistaken in my character. It has pleased God to place me in a situation of great publicity, but my natural disposition inclines me to privacy and retirement; and, though the applause that is the palm of Art is necessarily sweet to my sense, yet sweeter is the still small voice of tender relatives and estimable friends. You may therefore tell me as much as you please of those talents with which you say I am so miraculously gifted, and I will hear you with pleasure, and pray for a continuance of your illusion. But do not, *I conjure you,*

at least till opinion has a little more sanctioned the idea, do not bid all the world gaze, and wonder, *and certainly laugh*, at my yet feeble efforts.

“I am very much obliged to Mrs. Robinson,\* for her polite attention in sending me her poems. Pray tell her so with my compliments. I hope the poor charming woman has quite recovered from her fall. If she is half as amiable as her writings, I shall long for *the possibility* of being acquainted with her. I say, the possibility, because one’s whole life is one continued sacrifice of inclinations, which, to indulge, however laudable or innocent, would draw down the malice and reproach of those prudent people who never do ill, ‘but feed, and sleep, and do observances, to the stale ritual of quaint ceremony.’ The charming and beautiful

---

\* Mrs. Mary Robinson, the well-known novelist and poetess.

Mrs. Robinson ! I pity her from the bottom of my soul !

“ Pray go and take Betsy to Marlborough-street, to see my bust of my little son George. I could have done it better, but for the extreme heat of the weather, which made the clay crack and dry too fast. Adieu.

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ S. SIDDONS.”

“ *John Taylor, esq.*

“ *10, Hatton Garden, London.*”

In the following spring she writes thus to her friend Lady Harcourt :

“ *April 11, 1794.*

“ \* \* \* \* \* Our new theatre is the most beautiful that imagination can paint. We open it with “*Macbeth*,” on Easter Monday. I am told that the banquet is a thing to go and see of itself. The scenes and dresses all new, and

as superb and characteristic as it is possible to make them. You cannot conceive what I feel at the prospect of playing there. I dare say I shall be so nervous as scarcely to be able to make myself heard in the first scene.

“S. SIDDONS.”

In point of fact, the new House at Drury Lane had been opened, with a Concert of sacred music, on the 12th of March, though there was no regular dramatic performance till the 21st of April, when “*Macbeth*” was played.\*

An occasional prologue and epilogue were spoken by John Kemble and Miss Farren; a lake of real water was exhibited in the scenery;

---

\* The parts were cast as follows: *Macbeth*, John Kemble; *Banquo*, Wroughton; *Macduff*, Palmer; *Malcolm*, Charles Kemble (his first appearance); *Duncan*, Bensley; *Rosse*, Barrymore; *Lady Macbeth*, Mrs. Siddons; *Hecate*, Bannister; *Witches*, Moody, Dodd, and Suett.

and the audience were told that an iron curtain was in preparation. Thus far matters were judiciously accommodated to the public love of water, and dread of fire. But an innovation was made in the performance of "*Macbeth*," about the absurdity of which I am surprised that there should ever have been two opinions. The ghost of *Banquo* was omitted in the banquet-scene; and thus the audience, like the guests of *Macbeth*, seeing only an empty chair, were forced to conjure up the form of the spectral intruder by the force of their own imaginations. This idea was suggested to Kemble by some verses of the poet Edward Lloyd. It was a mere crotchet, and a pernicious departure from the ancient custom.

There was no rationality in depriving the spectator of a sight of *Banquo's* ghost, merely because the company at *Macbeth's* table are not supposed to see it. But we are not *Macbeth's* guests? We are no more a part

of their company than we are a part of the scenes or the scene-shifters. We are the poet's guests, invited to see "*Macbeth*:" to see what he sees, and to feel what he feels, caring comparatively nothing about the guests. I may be told, perhaps, that, according to this reasoning, we ought to see the dagger in the air that floats before *Macbeth*. But the visionary appearance of an inanimate object and of a human being are by no means parallel cases. The stage-spectre of a dagger would be ludicrous; but not so is the stage-spectre of a man appearing to his murderer. Superstition sanctions the latter representation: and as to the alleged inconsistency of *Banquo's* ghost being visible to us whilst it is unseen by the guests at the banquet, the argument amounts to nothing. If we judge by sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether; but, if we regulate our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible to whom they will: so that the

exclusion of *Banquo*, on this occasion, was a violation of the spiritual peerage of the drama, an outrage on the rights of ghosts,—and a worthier spectre than *Banquo's* never trode the stage.

On the 25th of July, this year, Mrs. Siddons bore her youngest daughter, Cecilia, the only one of her daughters who survived her. Though she doated on her son George, she had to part with him at an early period of his life, when he went to seek his fortune in India; and she never embraced him again but in his children. Cecilia lived to be the companion and solace of her later years. She is now the wife of Mr. G. Combe, of Edinburgh. In the autumn Mrs. Siddons writes thus to a friend :

“ *London ; September 11, 1794.*

“ My whole family are gone to Margate, whither I am going also ; and nothing would make it tolerable to me, but that my husband and



daughters are delighted with the prospect before them. I wish they could go and enjoy themselves there, and leave me the comfort and pleasure of remaining in my own convenient house, and taking care of my baby. But I am every day more and more convinced that half the world live for themselves, and the other half for the comfort of the former. At least, this I am sure of, that I have had no will of my own since I remember; and indeed, to be just, I fancy I should have little delight in so selfish an existence.

“Yours,

“S. S.”

She returned to Drury Lane at the customary time, but acted no new part till she appeared as the *Countess Orsina*, in the play of “*Emilia Galotti*,” translated from Lessing. This tragedy never took on the English stage, and had a run of only three nights. Its story has a palpable resemblance to that of *Virginia*, in *Livy*; and *Odoarto Gallotti*, the father of the

heroine, *Emilia*, puts the young lady to death, at her own suggestion, when her virtue is in danger from the tyrant, *Count Appiani*, who is the counterpart of the Roman Decemvir. But the catastrophe has a gratuitous over-tinge of German horror, for *Emilia's* danger is nothing so desperate as *Virginia's*, and by the fairest laws of dramatic probability she ought to have been saved.

The part of *Horatia*, in Whitehead's "Roman Father," was her *next new trial*; and certainly that revolting story, with its languid dialogue, was as unworthy of her powers as the former tragedy. Yet, if the daily critics may be trusted, both Kemble and his sister produced effects in acting that could not have been anticipated from reading the play. In the climax of opprobrium which *Horatia* casts upon her brother, Mrs. Siddons threw an emphasis on the word *Roman*, that was felt most powerfully.

The next piece in which Mrs. Siddons had a new character, was the production of an authoress, so justly celebrated, that I am reluctant to mention its untoward fate; but the fact of our great actress having, for once in her life, died a stage-death amidst general laughter, is an event in her history too remarkable to be omitted. On the 21st of March, 1795, a tragedy, called "Edwy and Elgiva," written by Miss Burney, afterwards Madam D'Arblay, was produced at Drury Lane. "We are sorry," says the *London Chronicle*, the following day, "that we cannot congratulate the fair authoress on the success of her first dramatic essay: for even the benedictions of the three bishops, whom she chose for her heroes, were not able to procure the salvation of it;—a circumstance which will probably induce her hereafter to employ something more than spiritual aid in support of a temporal cause."

Miss Burney was peculiarly unfortunate in

bringing bishops into her tragedy. At that time there was a liquor much in popular use, called Bishop : it was a sort of negus or punch, I believe, though the origin of its name I must leave more learned antiquaries to determine. But, be that as it may, when jolly fellows met at a tavern, the first order to the waiter was, *to bring in the Bishop*. Unacquainted with the language of taverns, Miss Burney made her King exclaim, in an early scene, "*Bring in the Bishop!*" and the summons filled the audience with as much hilarity as if they had drank of the exhilarating liquor. They continued in the best possible humour throughout the piece. The dying scene made them still more jocose, when a passing stranger proposed, in a tragic tone, to carry the expiring heroine to the other side of a hedge. This hedge, though supposed to be situated remotely from any dwelling, nevertheless, proved to be a very accommodating retreat ; for, in a few minutes afterwards, the wounded lady was brought from behind it, on an elegant couch, and, after dying in the pre-

sence of her husband, was removed once more to the back of the hedge. The solemn accents of the Siddons herself were not a match for this ludicrous circumstance, and she was carried off amidst roars of mirth.

She made her last appearance for the season as *Palmira*, in "Mahomet the Impostor," an indifferent tragedy of Voltaire's, translated by Miller. She never repeated the character. After "Mahomet," a little piece called "Edgar and Emmeline," attributed to Hawkesworth, and rather pleasing, was revived the same night; and she played the part of *Emmeline*, in which Mrs. Yates had been often admired. How it fared with Mrs. Siddons, on this occasion, I know not; but, in a two-act fairy tale, our great actress could scarcely be at home; and, indeed, the same thing may be said of all her new characters during the season.

In the ensuing season, at Drury Lane, she took a new character, as *Roxana*, in the tragedy

of "Alexander the Great." I never saw her performance of this part; but, from the impressions which she made, as *Athenais* and *Aspasia*, I can well imagine her to have been great in *Roxana*. The poetry of Lee, she once told me, had a much more frequent capability for stage effect than a mere reader would be apt to infer, from the superabundance of the poet's extravagance.

During this season she performed only two other new characters, namely, *Almeyda*, in the "Queen of Granada," by Miss Lee,\* and *Julia*, in Prince Hoare's tragedy of "Such Things

---

\* The "Queen of Granada," was acted at Drury Lane, April 20, 1796.

Parts: *Abdallah*, Regent of Granada, and uncle to *Almeyda*, Palmer; *Orasmyn*, his son, Wroughton; *Alonzo*, son to *Ramirez*, Kemble; *Hamet*, (Captain of the Moorish Guard,) C. Kemble: *Almeyda*, Mrs. Siddons; *Victoria*, Mrs. Powell. It was acted five times.

Were.”\* The writer of the former play may be said, like almost all our best novelists, to have been unsuccessful in the drama; a fact which the Prince of narrative fiction, Sir Walter Scott, has himself explained on philosophical principles. But, though Miss Lee’s tragedy has never, to my knowledge, been revived in London, since that season, it was respectfully received, and even applauded. Nor, on perusing it, can I perceive why it should not be more popular than many tragedies that keep possession of the stage.

The other piece, by Mr. Hoare, was founded on the well-known story of General Kirke’s atrocity. When brought out at Bath, in 1788,

---

\* “Julia, or Such Things Were,” was acted May 2, for Mrs. Siddons’s benefit.

Parts: *Edward Clifford*, Kemble; *Dudley*, Wroughton; *Duke of Monmouth*, C. Kemble; *General Kirke*, Caulfield; *Montague*, Whitfield; *Allan*, J. Aickin: *Julia*, Mrs. Siddons.

it had a run of eight nights, but it was not called for a second time at Drury Lane ; nor was it ever printed. Its author was a man of sense and modesty ; and, perhaps, shewed both of these qualities in keeping his tragedy from the press.

I am happy to find our great actress's name unconnected with the representation of that infamous bubble, "The Vortigern" of young Ireland, which it was attempted this year to pass off for a play of Shakespeare's. Sheridan launched this imposture on the stage of Drury Lane, on the 2d of April, 1796. Among its dupes there were, undoubtedly, some men of notoriety ; but the list of them included no individual whose judgment carried very high authority. The most respectable of the believers was Dr. Parr, who, with all his learning, was in many respects a simpleton : another was John Pinkerton, who, with a little learning, was a great charlatan : and a third was George Chalmers, who, with no learning at all, was



equally destitute of taste. That Sheridan believed the stuff of "Vortigern" to be authentic is not to be credited. His only folly consisted in dreaming that the public could be so grossly deceived.

Mrs. Siddons was not forced, like her unwilling brother, into the representation of this "solemn mockery." Though I know not how she excused herself, it appears that she was at one time enjoined to take the part of *Rowena*, and was actually employed in committing it to memory. To that circumstance she alludes, in the following letter :

*"London; March, 1796.*

**"MY DEAR FRIEND,**

"One would think I had already furnished conjectures and lies sufficient for public gossip; but now the people, here, begin again with me. They say that I am mad, and that *that* is the reason of my confinement. I

should laugh at this rumour were it not for the sake of my children, to whom it may not be very advantageous to be supposed to inherit so dreadful a malady; and this consideration, I am almost ashamed to own, has made me seriously unhappy. However, I really believe I am in my sober senses, and most heartily do I now wish myself with you at dear Streatham, where I could, as usual, forget all the pains and torments of illness and the world. But I fear I have now no chance for such happiness.

“All sensible persons are convinced that ‘Vortigern’ is a most audacious impostor. If he be not, I can only say that Shakespeare’s writings are more unequal than those of any other man. I am studying for ‘Vortigern’ and ‘Almeyda;’ and only scrawl these few lines, for fear you should have been frightened at some story of my biting or barking. With love to all around you, I am your affectionate

“*To Mrs. Piozzi.*”

“S. SIDDONS.”

Though Sheridan could not cheat the town into "Vortigern," he contrived to disappoint Mrs. Siddons out of all her profits during the season. Shortly after the recess, she writes thus to a friend :

" May, 1796.

" Here I am, sitting close in a little dark room, in a little wretched inn, in a little poking village called Newport Pagnell. I am on my way to Manchester, where I am to act for a fortnight; from whence I am to be whirled to Liverpool, there to do the same. From thence I skim away to York and Leeds: and then, when Drury Lane opens—who can tell? for it depends upon Mr. Sheridan, who is uncertainty personified. *I have got no money from him yet;* and all my last benefit, a very great one, was swept into his treasury; nor have I seen a shilling of it. Mr. Siddons has made an appointment to meet him today at Hammersley's. As I came away very early, I don't know the result

of the conference ; but, unless things are settled to Mr. Siddons's satisfaction, he is determined to put the affair into his lawyer's hands.

“ Yours, ever truly,

“ S. SIDDONS.”

A variety of circumstances, among which the *personified uncertainty* of Sheridan as to money matters was the most intolerable, now induced John Kemble to resign his office of Manager ; and, in September, 1796, he was succeeded by Wroughton. Wroughton was the friend of Mrs. Jordan ; and it was an article in his stage-creed that the public might be entertained much more effectively on comedy than on the costlier pomp of tragedy : so that his accession was regarded as an omen that Thalia had conquered Melpomene at Drury Lane ; or, in other words, that Mrs. Siddons was to retire, and Mrs. Jordan to remain as the chief genius of that theatre. Sheridan, however, knew better than to hazard such an

experiment; and, in spite of unsettled arrears, he had the address to bring back Mrs. Siddons for the ensuing season. She played on the 22d of September, for the benefit of the veteran Bensley, on the night of his farewell appearance on the stage.

Oct. 22,  
1796.



An attempt was made to give novelty to Mrs. Siddons's attraction, by assigning her the part of the heroine, in Thomson's "*Edward and Eleanora*;" and Kemble, though no longer Manager, played the *King*.\* But the dulness of the tragedy proved an overmatch for both their powers. Kemble, on this occasion, was uncommonly sombrous; and even his sister was thought saturnine. The only relief that was given to the tedium of the piece was the introduction of the babes, in their imperial frocks and long coating; when, after being

---

\* *King Edward*, John Kemble; *Selim*, Palmer; *Theald*, Caulfield; *Gloucester*, Whitfield: *Eleanora*, Mrs. Siddons; *Daraxa*, Mrs. Powell.


danced in the arms of attendants, they are handed into the bed of their (supposed to be) dying mother. The little darlings affected the House,—but it was with laughter. *It was acted but once.*

On the 15th of November she acted *Vitellia*, in “The Conspiracy;” a tragedy attributed to Jephson;\* of which, as it was never printed, I can say nothing from perusal. But I know that on the third, if not on the second, night of its representation, it obtained only an empty House. “Last night,” says the *Public Advertiser* for November 18, 1796, “the Siddons and the Kemble, at Drury Lane, acted to vacancy: the hollow sound of their voices was the most dreary thing in the world.”

All this time Mrs. Siddons had no occasion to alter her opinion of Sheridan, unless experi-

---

\* Kemble acted *Sextus*, and Palmer *Titus*.

1796.  ence had taught her that *Mr. Uncertainty Personified* might be always surely counted on as a defaulter. On the 9th of November she writes thus to a friend: "I am, as you may observe, acting again: but how much difficulty to get my money! Sheridan is certainly the greatest phenomenon that Nature has produced for centuries. Our theatre is going on, to the astonishment of everybody. Very few of the actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves: yet still we go on. Sheridan is certainly omnipotent.

"Yours, &c.

"S. S."

Physicians are known, in certain cases, to prescribe change of air for their patients *unconditionally*; that is, if the invalid cannot be taken to a better atmosphere, they advise his removal even to a worse. In like manner, players allege that the health of their popularity compels them often to leave their best characters, and to range through inferior ones,

for the sake of novelty and variety. In this pursuit, we have but too often seen our great actress trying "*change of air*;" though probably less from her own wishes than in obedience to the prescription of the Manager: and she had now sojourned for a season or two in the most vapid regions of the drama.

In the course of the ensuing year, I am gratified to find her drawing fresh parts—not from insipid tragedies—but from the masterly plays of Lillo. From an habitual partiality for this singular dramatist, the result of early and strong impressions upon my own mind, I was on the point of expressing unqualified enthusiasm at the idea of Mrs. Siddons's genius being employed in the representation of his works; but a moment's reflection reminds me, that our early prepossessions are a sort of gnomes and sylphs which invisibly govern the human mind, often in defiance of taste and judgment, and are therefore not to be rashly trusted. Lillo, I



aware, is a painter of truth, who carries its dreadful realities beyond the boundaries of poetical pleasure. At the acting of one of his pieces, "Arden of Feversham," the audience were so moved, that they got up and stopt the representation; nor could they be appeased till some one reminded them that they were looking only at a play. I must, therefore, be moderate in speaking of Lillo. To be sure, when I first read him, and found, to my unbounded satisfaction, that with a fire-side tragedy, and without either a king or a grandee, or a ghost, he could move,—ay, and master,—the heart, I thought him a greater genius than even Shakespeare. But, renouncing all that exaggeration, I still cannot consent to call him less than a potent writer. He is so masculine, so stanch, so much in earnest with his subject, that when I compare him with the bulk of tragedy-makers, they seem to be only playing at their art like children, whilst he, to use Ben Jonson's phrase, "*writes all like a man.*"

It was suggested to Mrs. Siddons that it would be of service to Charles Kemble to be brought forward in the character of *George Barnwell*.\* Mrs. Siddons asked Miss Pope, seemingly by way of conversation, if she had ever played *Lucy*, in that tragedy. The other said, that she never had played the part, nor ever would play it; but added, in joke, that if Mrs. Siddons would be *Millwood*, she would consent to be *Lucy*. When the part was sent to Miss Pope, she returned it to the prompter, with an angry note; but sent back for it, with an apology, when she learnt that her illustrious friend was really to play *Millwood*.

“George Barnwell, or the London Merchant,” was first brought out at Drury Lane, in 1731. It drew crowded houses. Pope, when he saw it represented, gave it high and

---

\* Nov. 28, 1796. *George Barnwell*, C. Kemble; *Thorowgood*, J. Aickin; *Trueman*, Holland; *Millwood*, Mrs. Siddons; *Maria*, Miss Miller; *Lucy*, Miss Pope.

almost unqualified praise. Many persons, on the first night, had bought the old ballad of "George Barnwell," with an intent to make a ludicrous comparison between that and the new play; but they found themselves so affected by the tragedy that they threw away the ballads, and took to their handkerchiefs.\*

---

\* Mr. Genest, in his "Account of the English Stage," says, "In the first edition of this tragedy, the last Act consists of eleven scenes. The tenth ends with *George Barnwell* going off to execution. The eleventh scene is short. *Trueman*, *Blunt*, and *Lucy* enter: the last says that *Millwood* goes to death with horror, loathing life, and yet afraid to die. Between these two scenes, Lillo afterwards inserted another, at the place of execution, with the gallows at the further end of the stage. This scene, though omitted in the modern theatres, was probably acted for several years, it ought never to have been laid aside.

"Dr. Percy printed the old ballad in his collection: he observes, 'The Ballad was printed as early as the middle of the 17th century. The tragical narrative seems to relate a real fact, but when it happened I have not been able to discover.'"—*Genest*, vol. ii. p. 296.

1797. The part of *Athenais*, in the "Force of Love," which she first performed on the 20th of January, 1797,\* gave her not only the attractiveness of a new character, but fair scope for the tenderness and force of her acting. She liked this part much, and she told me that she had played it with great popularity. The name of the piece reminds me of an incident, that gave me cause at once to be grateful for her good-nature, and to admire the tenacity of her memory, and the beauty of her recitation. One day, forgetting that she had ever played in any of Lee's dramas, and, what was worse, forgetting the merit of his masterpiece, "Theodosius," I talked contemptuously of the crackbrained Nathaniel. In justice I deserved a rebuke, if it had been only for speaking at random of dramatic poetry in the Siddons's presence. But it was a part of her benign

---

\* *Varanes*, J. Kemble ; *Theodosius*, Barrymore ; *Marcian*, Whitfield ; *Leontine*, J. Aickin : *Athenais*, Mrs. Siddons ; *Pulcheria*, Mrs. Powell.

character, so little understood but by those who knew her intimately, to argue unassumingly, even on the subjects which she best understood; and she answered my uncharitableness towards Lee more effectively than by censure. She discoursed on the merits of his "Theodosius;" drew a brief and clear sketch of the story, and quoted, as fluently as if she had been reading the play, from the speeches of all its characters. So charming a commentary on dramatic poetry I never heard, nor shall ever hear. It was a higher treat, if anything could be so, than even her subsequent readings of Tragedy,—to be thus familiarly instructed under her own roof, and with her own lips, by the Tragic Muse. Her looks and her voice were, at that time, still perfect; and, though not a young woman, yet the womanish sympathy which she evidently felt for *Athenais'* sorrows, made her seem much younger than she was. The noble being never seemed to me so feminine and so natural as on this occasion.

Her success in her next new character was still more striking. On the 3d of February she played *Arpasia*, in "*Tamerlane*,"\* a tragedy by Rowe, which, though it be chargable with declamation, has some passages of a high tone, and an underplot that is strongly affecting. Mrs. Siddons, at least, thought so; for she wrought herself up in the character to a degree of agitation that was perilous almost to her life. The lover of *Arpasia* (*Moneses*) is brought in, in the fifth Act, to be strangled by mutes. *Arpasia* says,

‘ Think ere we part.’

*Moneses.*

‘ Of what?’

*Arpasia.*

‘ Of something soft,

Tender and kind—of something wondrous sad.

Oh ! my full soul !’

---

\* *Tamerlane*, Palmer ; *Bajazet*, Kemble ; *Moneses*, Barrymore ; *Azalla*, Campbell : *Arpasia*, Mrs. Siddons ; *Selima*, Mrs. Powell.

*Moneses.*

‘ My tongue is at a loss.  
Thoughts crowd so fast,—thy name is all I’ve left.  
My kindest, truest, dearest, best Arpasia.’

[*The Mutes struggle with him.*

*Arpasia.*

‘ I have a thousand, thousand things to utter—  
A thousand more to hear yet—barbarous villains !  
Give me a minute. Speak to me, Moneses.’

*Moneses.*

‘ Speak to thee !—’tis the business of my life.  
’Tis all the use I have for vital air.—  
Stand off, ye slaves !—To tell thee that my heart  
Is full of thee ; that even at this dread moment  
My fond eyes gaze with joy and rapture on thee.  
Angels, and light itself, are not so fair.’

*Enter BAJAZET, KALY, and Attendants.*

*Bajazet.*

‘ Ha ! wherefore lives this dog ? Be quick, ye slaves !  
And rid me of my pain.’

*Moneses.*

‘ For only death, and the last night,  
Can shut out my Arpasia.’

[*The Mutes strangle MONESSES.*

*Arpasia.*

' Oh dismal !—'tis not to be borne ! Ye moralists !  
Ye talkers ! what are all your precepts now ?  
Patience ! Distraction ! Blast the tyrant ! blast him,  
Avenging lightnings—Snatch him hence, ye fiends—  
Love ! Death ! Moneses !'—

After these words, it was Mrs. Siddons's part to feign a swoon, but she swooned in earnest. Clutching her drapery with convulsive fingers, she fell back so that her head was heard striking the stage, and her limbs were exposed, which at once made it palpable to the spectator that her fall was neither studied nor voluntary. In a moment there was a rush from the pit and boxes to enquire for her on the stage. It was long before she recovered from the fainting fit.

Palmer, for his benefit this season, got up a tragedy called "The Queen of Carthage," in which Mrs. Siddons performed the part of *Dido*. I have never been able to get a sight



of this piece. It was printed, but the publication of it, according to the *Biographia Dramatica*, was stopped by the friends of its deceased author, Joseph Reed.\* The son of the author, nevertheless, gave Palmer 100*l.* for reviving it, and Mrs. Siddons 50*l.* to buy a new dress.

When she acted *Millwood*, in “George Barnwell,” Mrs. Siddons was generally alleged to have condescended to a part beneath her dignity. But, on the 2d of May, her performance of *Agnes*, in Lillo’s “Fatal Curiosity,” was reckoned amongst her most wonderful exhibitions. An instance of her effect in that character was related to me by Mr. Young the actor, who had it from a spectator of her performance on that very night. The individual to whom I allude is Mr. Crabbe Robinson, a

---

\* It was first acted at Drury Lane in 1767, with a Prologue by Garrick.

gentleman of the bar, and a scholar, well known in the world of literature. He was a young man at the time, but he since states that, in the course of a long life, he had never felt such an impression from acting. When Mrs. Siddons, as *Agnes*, was asked by *Old Wilmot* how they should support themselves, and when she produced the jewels of their unknown son, giving a remote hint at the idea of murdering him, she crouched and slid up to *Wilmot*, with an expression in her face that made the flesh of the spectator creep. Mr. Robinson said that from that moment his respiration grew difficult, and in a few minutes he lost all command of himself. When the murder-scene approached he laughed aloud, and there was a general cry in the pit to turn him out. The process of his ejection was even begun, and he had received some harsh treatment, when a humane woman interposed, who saw, and explained his real condition. He was in strong hysterics.

At the close of that same evening, Mrs. Siddons took a formal farewell for the season 1796-7, during which she acted *Jane Shore* twice.

## CHAPTER IX.

## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons performs *Mrs. Haller*, in "The Stranger"  
—Loses her Daughter Maria—Plays *Miranda*, in a  
Piece by Mr. Boaden; and the *Countess*, in Dr.  
Whalley's "Castle of Montval"—Two Letters of  
Miss Seward.

## CHAPTER IX.

DRURY LANE Theatre opened again, as usual, in September; and, during the season 1797-8, Mrs. Siddons performed more than forty times. She appeared, however, only in two new parts. One of these was the grave and gentle *Julia*, in Sheridan's "Rivals," which, though a character in comedy, is not a comic one. The other was *Mrs. Haller*, in "The Stranger," which she performed, at intervals, six and twenty times in the course of four months.

This play, which, as every one knows, is of German origin, has strong characteristics of its native country; the feelings and taste of which

Kotzebue, as a writer, represents perhaps more faithfully than a certain portion of his own countrymen are disposed to allow. The refined Germans affect to deny that Kotzebue is an esteemed writer in their own language. A classic writer he may not be, but he is nevertheless a popular author; and his works have contributed to the popularity of German literature. I grant that he is coarse and crude, and that the sublime and the ridiculous, in his fancy, have a great tendency, like the serpent's head and tail, to coil together; but it seems to me that he has more genius and less immorality than his hypercritics on either side of the Baltic have been disposed to allow him.

The celebrated A. W. Schlegel has been very severe upon Kotzebue. In his *Dramatic Lectures* he denounces "The Stranger" as an absolutely immoral drama; and he has promulgated this humane law in stage ethics, that when a poor woman has once tarnished her character,

she has nothing left for it but to die. She may be as penitent as she pleases—the more so the better. If her husband forgives her, she may be “a woman killed with kindness”—but die she must; and, if the author and his audience, according to Schlegel, allow her to live out the fifth Act, they are accessories after the fact to her criminality. If I were not treating this matter lightly, I could prove, I think, from the Bible itself, that this doctrine is not scriptural, and that it would be more Christian-like, to bid the penitent “go, and sin no more.” But I am afraid that the stagyrite, Augustus Wilhelm Schlegel, wrote this diatribe on Kotzebue when he was under the influence of no very charitable feelings; for the dramatist hated the critic, and there was no love lost between them.

Our English moralists in general took up the subject, with a sweeping condemnation of the character and literature of the nation from which the play of “The Stranger” had come,



and those were the loudest in the outcry who were least acquainted with the honest Germans—a people who, in kindness of heart and domestic morality, yield to none on the face of the earth:—always, of course, excepting ourselves. The true Englishman of that day, insulated by war, and inflamed by prejudices, thought it a part of his patriotism to hate and despise other countries; and he grew as fierce as an old bull at the apprehension of the Germans corrupting the purity of his taste and the innocence of his morals. Vehement was the outcry against Schiller for investing *Charles de Moore* with tragic honours; and care was taken to prevent the tragedy of “*The Robbers*” from being acted, in the very theatres that had echoed applauses to *Macheath*. This prohibition, co-operating, it may be supposed, with the enclosure of commons, and our improvements in police, happily prevented Schiller’s Muse from augmenting our highway robberies.

Above all, the immaculate Londoners were bitter in their complaints against the seductive influence of this sentimental drama, "The Stranger." "What are *double entendres*," says Mr. Boaden,\* "to that immorality which shocks us by no external signs, but insinuates itself into the bosom entirely, without defence, and in the disguise of sensibility." In short, all true choleric English patriots denounced translations from the German as so many seeds of our own demoralization. "The characters of Charlotte and Werter," they used to say, "what are they but printed apologies for extra-connubial attachment? Then we got from Germany *Charles de Moore*, glorifying robbery, and tempting our sons from the counting-house to Bagshot-heath. But what is even that, to 'The Stranger,' inculcating the *possibility* that a married woman's elopement may be forgiven, and that she may make it up, after all, with her

---

\* Life of Mrs. Siddons, Vol. II.

husband, with no more ado than if she had given him a snappish answer? What is to become of us, after this sentimental abrogation of the seventh Commandment? The time is approaching, when not a child in England will have its head patted by its legitimate father."

So said the moralizers in general; but Mr. Boaden went farther, for he pronounced the conjugal virtue of England to be already irremediably gone. "I consider," says my sage brother biographer, "*'The Stranger' as a noble ruin, marking the desolation of our domestic manners.*" Under these awful apprehensions, the Londoners most consistently proved the seductiveness of the play, by rushing in multitudes to see it; and they so crammed the House, that their ribs were not, metaphorically speaking, but corporially endangered.

After such alarms have been rung about the immorality of "*The Stranger*," I am almost

afraid to offer the most qualified opinion. But, though I think of it, as of "The Fair Penitent," that it is not the most advisable subject for the stage, I cannot see that it inculcates a demoralizing doctrine. *Haller* takes back his wife, with a virtual confession that his conduct is not in accordance *with*, but in exception *to*, the general law of treatment that is due to conjugal infidelity. Besides, we know not in what exact situation he restores her to his future protection. "The Stranger" has been naturalized amongst us for the third part of a century; and I suspect that, upon the whole, he has left our conjugal morals just about as pure as he found them.

This play was given out as a translation by a Mr. Thomson, but the greater part of it, as it was acted, was most probably written by Sheridan. Indeed, he said, in the hearing of my friend, Samuel Rogers, that he wrote every

word of it.\* One part of it, however, he openly avowed, namely, the song, "*I have a silent sorrow here ;*" which, if not unparalleled in its own merit, is at least so in its parody.

Mrs. Siddons's performance of the part of *Mrs. Haller* was the most delicate and judicious that can be imagined. She shewed what the poet clearly intended us to feel, namely, that the reconciliation was not a conclusion anticipated as a matter of reason or principle by either party, but a burst of nature, overwhelming all abstracted feelings of pride and considerations of stern propriety. She therefore sustained the part with tearless but touching self-command till the end of the very last scene, denoting that she had neither hope nor wish, beyond a promise from her husband that he would not hate her. All other

---

\* This is noticed in Moore's Life of Sheridan.

actresses of the part let fall their tears too soon; and, in the shower of their grief, dimmed to us that only redeeming light in which we can view *Mrs. Haller*. Though a penitent woman, she is conscious that she has no claim to more than her husband's dry-eyed forgiveness, and is therefore aware that she has no right, in their trying interview, to affect him with voluntary demonstrations of her sensibility. Mrs. Siddons accordingly conducted herself with a reserve and calmness that threw pride into humility; and thus, by contrast, made the effect of her agitation, in the last scene, undescribable.

In her personal history, this year was not one of the happiest. Early in the course of it she writes to a friend:

“ Jan. 7, 1798.

“ I can get no money from the theatre. My precious two thousand pounds are swallowed up in that drowning gulph, from whom no plea of right or justice can save its victims.”

By the "drowning" gulph, Mrs. Siddons means Mr. Sheridan.

A misfortune, of a very different and much more trying nature, was awaiting her, in the approaching fate of her beautiful daughter, Maria. At the close of the season, she writes thus to her old friend, Tate Wilkinson:

*" London; May 29, 1798.*

*" MY DEAR MR. WILKINSON,*

*" My plans for this summer are so arranged, that I have no chance of the pleasure of seeing you. The illness of my second daughter has deranged all schemes of pleasure as well as profit. I thank God she is better; but the nature of her constitution is such, that it will be long ere we can reasonably banish the fear of an approaching consumption. It is dreadful to see an innocent, lovely young creature daily sinking under the languor of illness, which may terminate in death at last, in spite*

of the most vigilant tenderness. A parent's misery, under this distress, you can more easily imagine than I can describe; but, if you are the man I take you for, you will not refuse me a favour. It would *indeed* be a great comfort to us all, if you would allow our dear Patty to come to us, on our return to town in the autumn, to stay with us a few months. I am sure it would do my poor Maria so much good; for the physician tells me she will require the same confinement and the same care the next winter. And, let it not offend the pride of my good friend, when I beg it to be understood, that I wish to defray the expense of her journey. Do, dear soul! grant my request. Give my kind compliments to your family, my love to my own dear Patty, and accept yourself the best and most cordial wishes of

“S. SIDDONS.”

Miss Wilkinson accepted the invitation, and became, from that time, a permanent inmate in



the Siddons' family. As her father, though not rich, was in comfortable circumstances, quite above dependence, her motives for remaining with the Siddons's were as purely affectionate as those of the friends who detained her. She became, in effect, an adopted child of the house; and it is hard to say, whether the mother or her daughters had the greater fondness for her. I have read with pleasure the letters which Maria and Sally Siddons wrote to Patty, beseeching her to get her father's consent to this domestication, and they breathe a romantic and unjealous friendship for their mother's favourite, which lasted during all the too short lives of those amiable sisters. Miss Wilkinson is still alive. She lived with the great actress till her last days. Besides the bland temper and disposition which attached Mrs. Siddons to her, she possessed a practical knowledge of the world, which made her a valuable inmate in the family.

During the summer of 1798 Mrs. Siddons

writes several letters to her friends, describing the fluctuation of her feelings, between fear and hope, respecting Maria. In one of them she says:

*“ London ; June, 1798.*

“ We are all going to Clifton, not because it is thought good for Maria, but because she fancies that place ; and I know so well, from sad experience, how powerfully the imagination operates on a feeble frame, that I hope, from the indulgence of her little whim, to reap some benefit from the journey.”

The lovely object of her anxiety died within four months of this date, and was buried at Bristol, with the following epitaph :

IN THE VAULT OF THIS CHURCH LIES INTERRED  
MARIA SIDDONS,  
WHO PARTED THIS LIFE  
AGED NINETEEN.

Early, bright, transient, chaste as morning dew,  
She sparkled, and exhaled—and went to heaven.

YOUNG.

Within a fortnight after the sad event, she wrote thus to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh :

“ Although my mind is not yet sufficiently tranquillized to talk much, yet the conviction of your undeviating affection impels me to quiet your anxiety so far, as to tell you that I am tolerably well. This sad event I have been long prepared for, and bow with humble resignation to the decree of that merciful God who has taken to himself the dear angel I must ever tenderly lament. I dare not trust myself further. Oh that you were here, that I might talk to you of her death-bed,—in dignity of mind, and pious resignation, far surpassing the imaginations of Rousseau and Richardson, in their *Eloise* and *Clarissa Harlowe* ; for hers was, I believe, from the immediate inspiration of the Divinity.

“ Yours,

“ S. S.”

In a letter to another friend, written shortly

afterwards, Mrs. Siddons speaks with a certain degree of alarm and anxiety about her financial prospects. Mr. Sheridan had not yet settled with her; and Mr. Siddons was engaged in speculations which threatened equally formidable pecuniary losses. I believe she alludes to his connexion with Sadler's Wells. It was fortunate for the public, if not for herself, that she still felt herself so far from the possession of affluence, as to be obliged to renew her efforts at Drury Lane in the following winter.

The first new part which she performed, in 1799, was *Miranda*, in Mr. Boaden's "Aurelio and Miranda." This play, the story of which was borrowed from Lewis's *Monk*, was well performed, and would have been well received, if the author had been more fortunate in his hearers; but the audience would not learn their parts. It was meant that they should be alternately sad and mirthful, the piece being

tragi-comic. They however laughed at the most tragic passages, and looked grave at the most comic.

In the choice of her next character she must have been biassed, and, if my reverence for her permitted, I should even say blinded by personal friendship. The Rev. Dr. Whalley wrote a tragedy called "The Castle of Montval," and Mrs. Siddons not only undertook to play the part of its heroine for her benefit, but used her influence in getting the piece brought on the stage.\* The Doctor affirmed, and I have no doubt with truth, in his Preface, that he had written this tragedy before he had read "The

---

\* Cast of the parts in "The Castle of Montval:"  
*Lapont*, Barrymore; *Old Count of Montval*, Kemble;  
*Young Count of Montval*, Holland; *Marquis of Vau-  
blanc*, (in love with *Matilda*,) C. Kemble; *Count of  
Colmar*, (Friend to the *Old Count*,) Aickin; *Blaise*, (an  
old Steward,) Packer; *Matilda*, (in love with the  
*Marquis*,) Mrs. Powell; *Teresa*, (Woman to the *Countess*,)  
Miss Heard.

Robbers," of Schiller; and, in the power of telling a dreadful story, he has certainly no resemblance to the German poet. The plot of "The Castle of Montval," is founded on a horrible fact, which was discovered in the south of France, in 1783, namely, the confinement of an unfortunate man in a domestic dungeon by his own family. In Dr. Whalley's play we find the young *Count de Montval* in his hereditary castle, married only a few days before to a young wife, whose character is meant to be the model of human perfection. She is tender, intrepid, gentle, submissive, and yet romantic and resolute. But, with all this compound of virtues in his spouse, the young *Count* is ill at ease in his stately mansion, from the circumstance of his having some time previously locked up his own father in a subterraneous apartment, pretending that he was dead, whilst in reality he had buried him alive. He resolves, on pretence of business, to repair to Paris, and to confide the keys of a whole wing of the castle, as well as of

the dungeon in which his sire is confined, to one *Lapont*, a villain, who is a sharer in his crime. His lady, when he takes leave of her, expresses a desire to have a sight of all the apartments in their habitation; but he conjures her to defer her visit to the shut-up wing till he should return. Notwithstanding this warning from his wife's curiosity, instead of putting the keys into *Lapont's* hand, he leaves them, with most marvellous neglect, upon a table, at his departure. They are snatched up by his Countess's waiting-maid; and she brings them to her mistress, together with terrific stories about the part of the house to which those keys gave access being haunted by a ghost, who groaned and spat fire at all who came in his way. This tempting circumstance determines the lady to console her chagrin for her lord's departure, by sleeping in one of the haunted chambers. She takes with her the old steward of the house, who is frightened out of his wits, and places

him as a sentinel at the outside of her chamber. Here, though no comic effect is intended, a good deal is produced, at least to my imagination, by the scene that follows; for the steward is so fearful in his watch that he takes a bottle of cordial liquor from his pocket, and, having swallowed it, falls fast asleep. Meanwhile his mistress, without the aid of such a sedative, falls asleep also, but is awakened by repeated groans. She starts up, looks round her chamber, and, tearing up the tapestry, discovers a hidden door. There she spies at a distance an aged figure advancing towards the light, and she calls out to him, "*Are you the ghost?*" Old *Montval* tells her his story; but, with a delicacy as preternatural as if he had been a spirit, insists on going back till morning to his dungeon, where the damps of the earth had bedewed his head. *Lapont* then enters, and attempts to stab the *Countess*, who drops a dagger that she had brought with her. Old *Montval* picks up the weapon, and kills the



villain. Young *Montval* enters, and starts back with horror at the sight of his father; but the old man, though he had been strong enough to dispatch *Lapont*, feels death approaching, and forgives his unnatural son. The *Countess* upbraids her husband, who falls at her feet, imploring pardon. She tells him to go and "*herd with cannibals that eat men's flesh.*" He takes out a dagger, and stabs himself. She pities him when it is too late, and exclaims, "I have murdered my husband!"

To give popularity to such a piece was out of the question. It is surprising enough that Mrs. Siddons, by her powerful acting, could save it from ridicule. Sagacious as she generally was in dramatic poetry, I must suppose her patronage of this tragedy a casual illusion of her taste, for, if she had seen it in its true light, she was too sincerely its author's friend not to advise him to write for the pulpit instead of the stage.

When the piece was got up at Bath, in 1812, the playbills modestly announced that it had been performed thirty times at Drury Lane, although it had had a run there of only eight nights.

Dr. Whalley, it seems, wrote this drama with the express view to Mrs. Siddons's appearance in it. This news the reverend poet communicated by post to Anna Seward, who sent him the following sensible answer :

“ You say I must read Mrs. Siddons's part in your tragedy, as written for her manner of speaking, and for her alone. I have always thought it her highest praise that she is no mannerist, but the warm, glowing, graceful creature who speaks, and looks, and moves by no other impulses but those of nature and passion, consequently with beauty, elegance, and majesty. If she had no other singularity except that of being the most perfect speaker

that can be heard, she would not be the transcendent actress which she is invariably found in tragedy. I can associate her face and form with any given part I am reading; but can no otherwise conceive her expression of countenance, intonation, and emphasis, than by imagining, to the best of my power, how a woman of fine understanding and feeling heart would look and speak, in the circumstances in which you have placed her. If more than that could be done, Mrs. Siddons would not be, as she is, guiltless of ever overstepping the modesty of nature to produce stage-effect. Mrs. Yates continually did that; and the pathetic Mrs. Cibber had a plaintive monotony which she could not vary. But Mrs. Pritchard and Garrick were, and Mrs. Siddons is, too great and just to be peculiar."

I know not whether the following poetical compliment to Mrs. Siddons is contained in Miss Seward's published poems, but the fol-

lowing note accompanied her sonnet; and I think it a curiosity of its kind, being a letter written by that lady, but never sent by her to the press.

## LETTER FROM MISS SEWARD TO MRS. SIDDONS.

*“ Lichfield, Monday Night;*

*“ Aug. 11.*

“I think myself unfortunate that impaired health generally obliges me to seek the coast at this season, when you are granted to the country, and sometimes to this neighbourhood. I have now to lament that a severe cough and inflammation on my lungs, which a fortnight ago prevented my leaving Staffordshire, form, in their yet lurking remains, a barrier to the highest gratification my heart and imagination can know. To encounter a crowded theatre during the present extreme sultriness would, disordered as I am, put my life to the hazard.

Anxiously do I hope it may not prove injurious to your health amidst exertions so trying. This night you represent *Calista*,—twice, in former years, I have witnessed how exquisitely.

“Ruminating this morning in sweet and better thought, your matchless talents, and my seldom power of enjoying their affluence, your virtues, and my distance from their sphere of action, the lines which you will find on this paper descended from my pen. I wish they were more worthy of you ; yet venture to present them to your acceptance.

“If you pass through Lichfield, on your return from Birmingham, I wish I might promise myself the honour of the Siddons sleeping beneath my roof. May I entreat of you, in the event of your return that way, to stop with me as many days as may be spared from the important demands upon your time. It is an honour and happiness of which I have been

long desirous. Should it be possible for me to obtain it now, favour me with a line, to say when I may expect you.

“ With compliments to Mr. Siddons, and with every kind good wish, I remain,

“ My dear Madam,

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ And obedient servant,

“ ANNA SEWARD.”

#### SONNET.

SIDDONS! when first commenc'd thy ardent course,  
The Powers, that guard the Drama's awful shrine—  
Beauty and grandeur, tenderness and force,  
Silence that speaks, and eloquence divine—  
For thee erected that approachless throne  
None may or hope to conquer or to share;  
And all our subject passions trembling own  
Each various sense subdu'd and captive there.  
Yet the heart says, “ Respect a rival claim,  
A claim that rises in unvanquish'd strife:  
Behold! dividing still the palm of fame,  
Her radiant science, and her spotless life.”



## CHAPTER X.



## CONTENTS.

She performs in Sheridan's "Pizarro"—in "Adelaide,"  
a Tragedy by Pye—*Lady Jane*, in Joanna Baillie's  
"De Montfort"—in Godwin's "Antonio"—in Sothe-  
by's "Julian and Agnes"—in "The Winter's Tale"  
—Her danger from Fire in the Statue-scene—Visits  
Wales, on her way to Ireland.

## CHAPTER X.

DURING the rest of her professional life, Mrs. Siddons appeared in no new drama that attracted crowded houses, excepting "Pizarro." The season of 1799 was an uncommonly protracted one at Drury Lane; it was not concluded till the 4th of July, and the last thirty-five nights of it were almost consecutively employed in the representation of this piece, which was adapted to the stage entirely by Sheridan, from an English translation of Kotzebue's German play. Sheridan certainly put no new laurels on his head by this adaptation, and he got no solid credit for it, except at his banker's; but he made money, for which, at that time, he was perhaps more immediately

anxious than for fame. In some particulars, it must be confessed, that he has rather amended the original. He judiciously omitted the comic scene of *Diego*, as well as *Elvira's* confession of her love for *Alonzo*, and her reappearance in the character of a nun. His introduction of *Rolla's* passage across the bridge was also a strikingly improving touch. In that scene, the pencil of Lawrence has done noble justice to the form of Kemble.

In adapting "*Pizarro*" for the stage, Sheridan, unacquainted with the original language, worked from an English paraphrase. With regard to style and imagery, he may have sometimes relieved the overflat familiarity of the German play, but, where he found the opposite fault of turgidity, he has adhered with tolerable fidelity to the British translator. In one speech, a warrior predicts that his bones will rattle in his tomb with joy at his posthumous fame; and in the first scene of the second

Act, *Cora* talks as follows about her child acquiring the organs of mastication. "When first the white blossoms of his teeth appear, breaking the crimson buds that did enclose them." *Elvira* says to *Pizarro*, at the end of the third Act, "Thou on Panama's brow didst make alliance with the raving elements, that tore the silence of that horrid night;—when thou didst follow, as thy pioneer, the crashing thunder's drift, and, stalking o'er the trembling earth, didst plant thy banner by the red volcano's mouth. Thou who, when battling on the sea, and thy brave ship was blown to splinters, wast seen, as thou didst bestride a fragment of the smoking wreck, to wave thy glittering sword above thy head, as thou wouldst defy the world in that extremity. Come, fearless man, meet and survive an injured woman's fury, if thou canst."

If this be not bombast, what does the word mean?

Sheridan was fond of borrowing, but he was a fairer dealer in metaphors than in money, and generally took the loan of the former from himself. To adorn "Pizarro," he drew largely from his own orations at Westminster Hall; and particularly from his speech on Hastings' trial. He had a personal right, no doubt, to these flowers of speech, and some of them, in their proper place, were very beautiful; but still they were flowers that scarcely bore to be transplanted, and they assorted indifferently with the German *bouquet* of dramatic eloquence. So that, upon the whole, perhaps, Sheridan's mutation of the piece amounted to the Irish improvement,—of turning bad into worse.

Nevertheless, I cannot censure Kotzebue's "Pizarro," without qualification. It is bad, in as far as there is some fustian in the style, and outrageous sentimentality in the portraiture of character.

The resolution of *Rolla* to stop among his enemies, though he knows that they will burn him alive, rather than kill a snoring sentinel, is extravagantly unnatural; and so are fifty other circumstances that could be pointed out. I am even free to own, that the piece, to a great extent, owed its fortune to scenery, music, and processions.\* But, the more I look at Kötzebue's faults, the more I am inclined to give him credit for a certain liveliness in dealing with the fancy, that pleases us in spite of them.

---

\* Cast of parts: *Elvira*, Mrs. Siddons; *Rolla*, Kemble; *Alonzo*, C. Kemble; *Pizarro*, Barrymore; *Ataliba*, Powell; *Las Casas*, J. Aickin; *Orozembo*, Dowton; *Valverde*, R. Palmer; *Old Blind Man*, Cory; *Boy*, Master Chatterley; *Sentinel*, Holland; *Cora*, Mrs. Jordan.

Boaden says, in his *Life of Kemble*, that Sheridan was miserably anxious about the success of "*Pizarro*," on the night of its representation. He was sufficiently miserable about Mrs. Jordan's inability to speak a line of the part of *Cora*; but he also dreaded that Mrs. Siddons would not fall in with his notion of *Elvira*. The actress agreeably surprised him.

We all remember that "Pizarro" had an imposing effect upon every spectator, from the King to the commoner. Its attractiveness was felt universally. Nor do I believe that all the pageantry in the world could have wrought so powerfully on the senses, if the piece had not possessed something intrinsically animating. Its subject was new, and peculiarly fortunate. It brought the adventures of the most romantic kingdom of Christendom into picturesque combination with the simplicity and superstitions of the transatlantic world ; and gave the imagination a new and fresh empire of Paganism, with its temples, and rites, and altars, without the stale associations of pedantry. I think, if Homer had lived in our own days, he would have laid his scenes in South America.

At first, I believe, Mrs. Siddons by no means liked the character of the camp-follower, *Elvira*, but she certainly raised it into respectability ; and it is remarkable that, with the exception of

*Mrs. Haller*, she never performed any character originally that she rendered half so popular. Very different was the impression produced by the next new piece that greeted the winter of 1800, and in which our great actress bore a part; namely, the tragedy of "*Adelaide*," by Mr. Pye. The Poet Laureate's drama had not the hundredth part of the positive faults of that of Kotzebue; but it had the irredeemable negative fault of lacking interest.

On the 29th of April, Mrs. Siddons performed a new part, as the *Lady Jane*, in Joanna Baillie's tragedy of "*De Montfort*." I have already adverted to the surprizing fact, that dramas, which we peruse in our libraries with little interest, have sometimes been made, by fine acting, most attractive on the stage. The works of Joanna Baillie afford at least one instance of a perfectly converse nature. They will be read with pleasure as long as our lan-



guage lasts, and yet they have never acquired popularity in the theatre.

To account for this fact, an indiscreet admirer of this poetess would probably resort to the plausible topics of a degenerate public taste, as well as of the enormous size of our theatres, and the pageantry required for filling the stage, which, undoubtedly, diverts the mind from attention to more spiritual charms; but I have too much respect for Joanna Baillie's genius, to form any estimate of it on questionable grounds. She brought to the drama a wonderful union of many precious requisites for a perfect tragic writer;—deep feeling, a picturesque imagination, and, except where theory and system misled her, a correct taste, that made her diction equally remote from the stiffness of the French, and the flaccid flatness of the German school: a better stage style than any that we have heard since the time

of Shakespeare, or, at least, since that of his immediate disciples.

But, to compose a tragedy that shall at once delight the lovers of poetry and the populace, is a prize in the lottery of Fame, which has literally been only once drawn during the whole of the last century, and that was by the author of "Douglas." He, too, wrote several tragedies that were sheer blanks. Scott and Byron themselves both failed in dramatic composition. It is evident, therefore, that Melpomene demands on the stage something, and a good deal more, than even poetical talent, rare as that is. She requires a potent and peculiar faculty for the invention of incident adapted to theatric effect;—a faculty which may often exist in those who have not been bred to the stage, but which, generally speaking, has seldom been shewn by any poets who were not professional players. There are exceptions to the remark, I know, but there are not many. If Shakespeare

had not been a player, he would not have been the dramatist that he is.

If Joanna Baillie had known the stage practically, she would never have attached the importance which she does to the development of single passions in single tragedies; and she would have invented more stirring incidents to justify the passion of her characters, and to give them that air of fatality which, though peculiarly predominant in the Greek drama, will also be found, to a certain extent, in all successful tragedies. Instead of this, she contrives to make all the passions of her main characters proceed from the wilful natures of the beings themselves. Their feelings are not precipitated by circumstances, like a stream down a declivity, that leaps from rock to rock; but, for want of incident, they seem often like water on a level, without a propelling impulse.

If, in speaking thus freely of a much re-

garded cotemporary, I should seem indelicate, let it be remembered that Mrs. Siddons's performance of *Jane de Montfort* is no uninteresting part of the great actress's history; and that, having to deal with the subject, I could not but speak candidly: for, if I took sincerity out of these pages, what value would be left in them?

Joanna Baillie's two first tragedies were regarded by the reading world as the sweetest strains that hailed the close of the eighteenth century. John Kemble thought that "*De Montfort*" would suit the stage; and his acting in the piece, as well as Mrs. Siddons's, was amazingly powerful. Every care was taken that it should receive scenic decoration. Capon painted a very unusual pile of scenery, representing a church of the fourteenth century, with its nave, choir, and side aisles, magnificently decorated, and consisting of seven planes in succession. In width this extraordinary elevation was about

56 feet, 52 in depth, and 37 in height. It was positively a building.

“*De Montfort*” had a run of eleven nights. The accounts of its reception are discrepant; but its representation has been, at all events, infrequent. It was brought out again in 1821, when Kean played the part of *De Montfort* very ably. I shall never forget that performance. There was a vast audience; among whom, I dare say, not threescore persons were personally acquainted with the author of the play. But the poetical character of her who had painted the loves of *Count Basil* and *Victoria* was not forgotten; and there was a deep and placid attention paid to “*De Montfort*,” that might have led you to imagine every one present was the poetess’s friend. There was so much silence, and so much applause, that, though I had had misgivings to the contrary, I was impressed, at the end, with a belief that the play had now acquired, and would henceforth

for ever retain stage popularity. But when I congratulated Kean on having rescued "*De Montfort*," he told me that, though a fine poem, it would never be an acting play.

If I were asked how I can call poetry beautiful which adapts itself with difficulty to the stage, I should answer, that Milton's "*Comus*" is an exquisite poem, but Mrs. Siddons herself could never give it stage popularity.

I cannot dismiss the subject without noticing that Joanna Baillie has left a perfect picture of Mrs. Siddons, in her description of *Jane de Montfort*. In Act 2, Scene 1, the *Page* says to the *Countess Friberg*,

'Madam, there is a lady in your hall  
Who begs to be admitted to your presence.'

*Lady.*

'Is it not one of our invited friends?'

*Page.*

‘No; far unlike to them. It is a stranger.’

*Lady.*

‘How looks her countenance?’

*Page.*

‘So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,  
I shrunk at first in awe; but when she smiled,  
Methought I could have compassed sea and land  
To do her bidding.’

*Lady.*

‘Is she young or old?’

*Page.*

‘Neither, if I right guess; but she is fair.  
For Time has laid his hand so gently on her,  
As he too had been awed.’

*Lady.*

‘The foolish stripling!  
She has bewitch’d thee. Is she large in stature?’

*Page.*

‘So stately, and so graceful is her form,  
I thought at first her stature was gigantic;  
But, on a near approach, I found in truth  
She scarcely does surpass the middle size.’

*Lady.*

‘What is her garb?’

*Page.*

‘I cannot well describe the fashion of it :  
She is not deck’d in any gallant trim,  
But seems to me clad in the usual weeds  
Of high habitual state.’

*Lady.*

‘Thine eyes deceive thee, boy.  
It is an apparition thou hast seen.’

*Friberg.*

‘It is an apparition he has seen,  
Or it is Jane de Montfort.’

The next new tragedy that was brought out at Drury Lane was from the pen of Godwin.\* Mrs. Siddons performed in it; and, from the author of Caleb Williams, a potent drama

---

\* Namely, “Antonio, or the Soldier’s Return,” first performed December 13, 1800. *Don Antonio*, J. Kemble; *Don Gusman*, Barrymore; *Don Henry*, C. Kemble; *Don Pedro, King of Arragon*, Wroughton: *Helena*, Mrs. Siddons.



might well be expected: it went, however, only through three nights. Godwin, in two respects, may compare notes with his brother novelist, Fielding. They both tried the drama without success; and they could both afford to pay for the disappointment out of their ample fame for original genius.

Among men of this class, I doubt if we can well rank the lately deceased William Sotheby; though his learning, accomplishments, and industry, entitle his name to a most respectful remembrance. His translation of "Oberon" is among the best poetical versions in our language; and I know that Wieland sent his thanks to him for the performance. But the worthy Sotheby had few ingredients of talent for dramatic poetry; and his "Julian and Agnes," which came out this season, was eminently unsuccessful. In the course of its performance, Mrs. Siddons, as the heroine, had to make her exit from the scene with an infant in her arms.

Having to retire precipitately, she inadvertently struck the baby's head violently against a door-post. Happily the little thing was made of wood, so that her doll's accident only produced a general laugh, in which the actress herself joined heartily.\*

May 13,  
1801.

Having finished the season of 1801 by a performance for her brother Charles's benefit, (May 13,) she resumed the accustomed fatigue of her visits to the provincial theatres. From nineteen years of such splendid exertions in London, it might have been expected that a fortune would have accrued to her, at least, sufficient wealth to have precluded the necessity for those summer campaigns. But, from her Correspondence, I find that circumstances absolutely debarred her from relaxing her la-

---

\* "Julian and Agnes" was acted April 25. *Alfonso* (really *Julian*), Kemble; *Provost*, Wroughton; *Confessor*, Barrymore; *Infirmier*, Holland; *Prior*, Packer; *Francis*, Attendant on *Agnes*, Powell; *Agnes*, *Countess of Tortona*, Mrs. Siddons; *Ellen*, Miss Biggs.

bours; though she frequently complains, in her Letters, not only of lassitude, but of suffering. The erysipelas, which was ultimately fatal in her old age, began thus early to attack her with a burning heat in her lips, that was often very tormenting.

On the 14th of July she writes to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh, from Preston.

“ In about a fortnight I expect to commence my journey to Bath. Mr. Siddons is there; for he finds no relief from his rheumatism elsewhere. His accounts of himself are less favourable than those of any one who writes to me about him; but I hope and trust that I shall find him better than he himself thinks; for I know, by sad experience, with what difficulty a mind, weakened by long and uninterrupted suffering, admits hope, much less assurance. I shall be here till next Saturday, and after that time at Lancaster, till Tuesday,

the 28th; thence I shall go immediately to Bath, where I shall have about a month's quiet, and then begin to play at Bristol for a few nights. "*Such resting finds the sole of unblest feet!*" When we shall come to London is uncertain, for nothing is settled by Mr. Sheridan, and I think it not impossible that *my* winter may be spent in Dublin; for I must go on *making*, to secure the few comforts that I have been able to attain for myself and my family. It is providential for us all that I can do so much. But I hope it is not wrong to say, that I am tired, and should be glad to be at rest indeed. I hope yet to see the day when I can be quiet. My mouth is not yet well, though somewhat less exquisitely painful. I have become a frightful object with it for some time, and, I believe, this complaint has robbed me of those poor remains of beauty once admired, at least, which, in your partial eyes, I once possessed. \* \* \* \* \*

"Yours very truly,

"S. S."

She dropped her intention of going to Dublin, and returned early in the following winter to Drury Lane, where she performed above forty times. It was during this season that the list of her new characters terminated, worthily, with one of Shakespeare's. On the 25th of March, 1802, she, for the first time, performed *Hermione*, in the "Winter's Tale." The infrequency of her acting from the Shakespearian drama must be ascribed to the fact, that she was, generally speaking, not a free agent in the choice of her characters. The popular taste, whether right or wrong, was to be gratified; and the enlightened public, at this time, would troop in suffocating multitudes, for nights together, to see the "Castle Spectre" of Lewis, whilst the plays of Shakespeare could hardly draw an audience.

She must have long foreseen the transcendent charm which her performance would bestow on the part of *Hermione*; yet there was a

policy in reserving it for the years of her professional appearance when her form was becoming too matronly for the personation of juvenile heroines. At the same time, she still had beauty enough left to make her so perfect in the statue-scene, that assuredly there was never such a representative of *Hermione*. Mrs. Yates had a sculpturesque beauty that suited the statue, I have been told, as long as it stood still; but, when she had to speak, the charm was broken, and the spectators wished her back to her pedestal. But Mrs. Siddons looked the statue, even to literal illusion; and, whilst the drapery hid her lower limbs, it shewed a beauty of head, neck, shoulders, and arms, that Praxiteles might have studied. This statue scene has hardly its parallel for enchantment even in Shakespeare's theatre. The star of his genius was at its zenith when he composed it; but it was only a Siddons that could do justice to its romantic perfection. The heart of every one who saw her when she burst from

the semblance of sculpture into motion, and embraced her daughter, *Perdita*, must throb and glow at the recollection.

It so happened, however, that our great actress, whilst performing a part, in which she will never have her equal, very narrowly escaped from a death more than fancifully tragic. I have heard her say, that she could never think of the “*Winter’s Tale*” without a palpitation at her heart, from the recollection of the incident to which she alludes, in the following letter to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

“*London ; April, 1802.*

“ \* \* Except for a day or two, the weather has been very favourable to me hitherto. I trust it may continue so, for the ‘*Winter’s Tale*’ promises to be very attractive; and, whilst it continues so, I am bound in honour

and conscience to put my shoulder to the wheel, for it has been attended with great expense to the Managers, and, if I can keep warm, I trust, I shall continue tolerably well. As to my plans, they are, as usual, all uncertain; and I am precisely in the situation of poor *Lady Percy*, to whom *Hotspur* comically says, ‘I trust thou wilt not utter what thou dost not know.’

“This must continue to be the case, in a great measure, whilst I continue to be the servant of the public, for whom (and let it not be thought vain,) I can never sufficiently exert myself. I really think they receive me every night with greater and greater testimonies of approbation. I know it will give you pleasure to hear this, my dear friend, and you will not suspect me of deceiving myself in this particular.

“The other night had very nearly terminated



*all my exertions* ; for, whilst I was standing for the statue in the 'Winter's Tale,' my drapery flew over the lamps that were placed behind the pedestal; it caught fire, and, had it not been for one of the scene-men, who most humanely crept on his knees and extinguished it, without my knowing anything of the matter, I might have been burnt to death, or, at all events, I should have been frightened out of my senses. Surrounded as I was with muslin, the flame would have run like wildfire. The bottom of the train was entirely burned. But for the man's promptitude, it would seem as if my fate would have been inevitable. I have well rewarded the good man, and I regard my deliverance as a most gracious interposition of Providence. There is a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow. Here I am, safe and well. God be praised! and may his goodness make me profit, as I ought, by the time that is vouchsafed me. \* \* \*

“My son Harry’s success has been a very great comfort to me. I do think, if I can divest myself of partiality, that it is a very respectable first attempt.\*

“Yours ever truly,

“S. S.”

In another letter to the same friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh,† she alludes to a friendly effort which she made in behalf of the sceneman, and in which, I believe, she was successful, namely, in getting a pardon for his son, who was a soldier, and had deserted.

“ \* \* I have written myself almost blind

---

\* Henry Siddons made his first appearance this season at Covent Garden.

† Mrs. Fitz Hugh is the lady of W. Fitz Hugh, esq., of Bannisters, near Southampton, late Member of Parliament for Tiverton. She is a branch of the Ducal family of Hamilton, and the sister of Mr. Hamilton,

for the last three days, worrying everybody to get a poor young man, who otherwise bears a most excellent character, saved from the disgrace and hideous torture of the lash, to which he has exposed himself. I hope to God I shall succeed. He is the son of the man, by me ever to be blest, who preserved me from being burned to death, in the 'Winter's Tale.' The business has cost me a great deal of time; but, if I attain my purpose, I shall be richly paid. It is twelve o'clock at night; I am tired very much. To-morrow is my last appearance. In a few days I shall go to see my dear girl, Cecilia. How I long to see the darling!

"Oh, how you would have enjoyed my *entrée*, in *Constance*, last night. I was received

---

the accomplished author of "Egyptiaca." Mrs. Siddons was for half her life-time the attached friend and incessant correspondent of Mrs. F., and seldom spent a year without visiting her, at Bannisters.

really as if it had been my first appearance in the season. I have gone about to breakfasts and dinners, for this unfortunate young man, till I am quite worn out with them. You know how pleasure, as it called, fatigues.

“Ever yours,

“S. S.”

## CHAPTER XI.

VOL. II.

T

## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons goes to Ireland with melancholy Presentiments—She visits Conway Castle, in Wales—Fulfilis her Engagement at Dublin, and accepts one at Cork—Becomes alarmed by the News of her Daughter Sally's Illness—Quits her Engagement at Cork—Returns to England, and finds her Daughter dead—Acts in the Winter at Covent Garden again—Is severely affected in her Health—The Popularity of the Boy Betty.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE heavy defalcations of payment which Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble had often suffered at Drury Lane, induced them both to retire from that Theatre at the close of the season of 1802. Mrs. Siddons's professional industry being still indispensable for the comforts of her family, and Ireland appearing, for the present, to be its most promising field, she repaired thither with the view of wintering in Dublin. She was accompanied by her friend Miss Wilkinson; and, though she had to count upon this absence from home being longer than usual, it is difficult to see why the prospect of it should have filled her with dark forebodings.

Yet I know that she left London, on this occasion, with an unaccountable melancholy upon her mind, and an undefined anticipation that some great misfortune was awaiting her. She honoured me with a short note before her departure, from the tenor of which I imagined that the calamity she anticipated was her own death; for she expressed her fears that she should never see her friends in England again. When she took leave of the elder Mr. Greatheed she gave way to grief in a manner quite unusual to her, and told him she augured that they were never to meet more, till after some great affliction had befallen her. By one of those accidents that almost palliate superstition, they never did meet till after Mr. Greatheed had lost his only son, and she her beloved daughter, Sarah Maria. In a letter to Mrs. Piozzi, she anticipates a different event, that might have been more naturally expected.



*" May, 1802.*

" Farewell, my beloved friend ! a long, long farewell ! Oh, such a day as this has been ! to leave all that is dear to me. I have been surrounded by my family, and my eyes have dwelt with a foreboding tenderness, too painful, on the venerable face of my dear father, that tells me I shall look on it no more. I commit my children to your friendly protection, with a full and perfect reliance on the goodness you have always manifested towards

" Your ever faithful and affectionate

" S. SIDDONS."

At the moment of her parting from Mr. Greatheed, his son Bertie was in robust health. The daughter whom she was destined to see no more had been an invalid during the winter, but, I remember, for I was at that time very intimate in the family, that, when Mrs. Siddons set out on the journey, Sally was so well as to enjoy parties very cheerfully, both

at home and abroad; and that there was nothing to justify apprehensions respecting her, in the breast of the fondest parent. Mrs. Siddons left Marlborough street late in May, and, within a few weeks afterwards, Sally was in such health and spirits, that she wrote the following letter to Miss Wilkinson, dated

*“ Queen's Parade, Bath ;*

*“ July 2, 1802.*

*“ MY DEAR PATTY,*

*\* \* \* \* \**

*“ We had several very pleasant parties before I left London. Charles Moore's pic-nic was quite delightful, it was such fine weather, the Temple Gardens so gay, and the whole scene so beautiful. Bertie Greatheed dined with us, and we walked with him to the Temple, where we arrived at half-past seven : Mrs. Kemble was there. We had tea and coffee ; Dorothy Place and I presided. The rest of my father's party were Mr. Lysons, &c. After tea we walked in*

the garden till nine, at which time a bell rings, after which no promenading in the garden is permitted. We were all very agreeable, only Dorothy was a little disconcerted because Bertie found fault with her new hat: she looked, however, very beautiful in it. We had a pretty cold supper, and did not part till past twelve o'clock. On Wednesday we went to a party at Sadler's Wells, where we were very pleasant; and on Saturday Charles Moore sent us orders to see the 'Surrender of Calais,' and 'Fortune's Frolic.' How delightfully I laughed at 'Fortune's Frolic.'"

She afterwards alludes to her brother's marriage with Miss Murray.

"Miss Murray looked very beautiful, in a white chip hat, with a lace cap under it, her long dark pelisse tied together with purple bows, ready for travelling. Harry was so nervous that Miss Payne was nursing him up with

good things. At nine, my father, Mr. Murray, &c. &c. and I, went to church. The ceremony had hardly begun before poor Henry turned as pale as death, and shook from head to foot so that he was obliged to hold by the rails near him to support himself. Miss Murray trembled, and, before she could finish what she had to say after the clergyman, her tears prevented her speaking out: she replied the rest in a whisper. I was extremely affected, and, turning to look at the rest, I found that my moist handkerchief was not without companions. Harry was very ready to reply, and cried out, 'I will,' before it was necessary. He wanted to put on the ring, too, before the proper time. After they were married we signed our names, as witnesses, under them. Then we all saluted Mrs. Henry Siddons, and, as soon as we returned to their lodgings, they set off for Birmingham. My father made the bride a present of a handsome coral necklace, bracelet, and earrings. I meant

to have given her a ring, but that provoking Hamlet did not send it home in time.

\* \* \* \*

“ Yours, my dearest Patty,

“ SARAH MARIA SIDDONS.

“ *To Miss Wilkinson, with Mrs. Siddons,  
Theatre Royal, Dublin.*”

Mrs. Siddons and her friend proceeded to Ireland by the way of Holyhead. At first her spirits were extremely depressed, but they recovered, at last, by the change of air and scenery. She, very naturally, stopped at Stratford, to visit the house of Shakespeare. Here, in spite of her melancholy, she was forced to smile at the cool impudence of a woman who shewed them the mansion of the mighty poet, and endeavoured to palm upon their credulity a little monster of a boy, with a double tongue, by the name of William Shakespeare, as a great grandson's grandson of his immortal namesake. The shew-

woman was marvellously loquacious, and Mrs. Siddons remarked that nature had endowed *her* also with a double allowance of tongue.

Miss Wilkinson has shewn me a Diary of this journey, which she wrote more than thirty years ago. "On the 25th of May," she says, "a beautiful day, we entered Wales, and got to Conway before sunset. Mrs. Siddons walked about the romantic castle for more than an hour. There were harpers below the building. She sat at one of the windows of the ruins, looking out upon the lovely scenery,—the river glowing in the balmy sunshine,—the vessels gliding up and down,—and the glorious Welsh mountains, till she seemed absorbed in a luxuriant reverie. We returned to our inn, and during supper a harper was admitted, according to custom, to entertain the strangers. He was the most venerable looking man I ever saw. Mrs. Siddons said that he gave her mind the image of a Druid." In that romantic time and place Mrs.

Siddons honoured the humblest poet of her acquaintance by remembering him; and let the reader blame or pardon my egotism, as he may think fit, I cannot help transcribing what the Diarist adds,—‘Mrs. Siddons said, I wish that Campbell were here.’

“We left Conway,” Miss Wilkinson continues, “next morning, and ere long crossed Penman Mawr, where, like other travellers, we alighted from our carriages to look from a bridge that commands the fullest view of the sublime landscape, with all its rocks and water. A lady within hearing of us was in such ecstasies, that she exclaimed, ‘This awful scenery makes me feel as if I were only a worm, or a grain of dust, on the face of the earth.’ Mrs. Siddons turned round, and said, ‘I feel very differently.’”

From Dublin, after two months’ acting, she wrote to Mrs. Fitz Hugh, on the 2d of August,

that her reception in the Irish capital had equalled her highest expectations, and that her profits had gone beyond them. A few days afterwards, she left Dublin for Cork, and performed at the latter place for several weeks, at the end of which she returned to the North, and acted at Belfast for nearly a month, amidst the loudest greetings of enthusiasm.

From Belfast she and her companion, after spending some days with the hospitable family of Gosford Castle, returned once more to Dublin, and found there, among other letters from England, one from Mr. Siddons, expressing considerable anxiety on pecuniary matters,—stating that a large sum of money had been expended on the house in Marlborough street, and that a still greater sum would be required for fitting-out George for India, and requesting therefore, if Mrs. Siddons did not remain in Dublin, that she would go and perform at Liverpool. She preferred the far more lucrative specu-



lation of continuing in the Irish capital, and renewed her engagement with the Manager, Jones. Meanwhile her popularity, both personal and professional, was unabated. The presence of Royalty could not have been welcomed with more demonstrations of zeal than she received from all ranks of the community; and she speaks, in all her letters, with gratitude of the "*warm-hearted Irish.*" But, though fêted by the rich, flattered by the talented, and cheered wherever she made her appearance, she had still to endure those harassments which are scarcely separable from the player's vocation. Mr. Jones was not only an overbearing gentleman, but so practically litigious, that it was unsafe to gainsay his managerial will in the slightest particular; for he concluded every dispute by sending for his solicitor; and, by long training, he had become an adept in litigation. It required all her patience to fulfil her engagement with him peaceably, and without forfeiting either her profits or dignity.

With all her popularity, too, she was not without some detractors, even on the warm-hearted side of the Channel. It was rumoured, indeed asserted, in a Dublin newspaper, that she had refused to play for the benefit of the Lying-in Hospital. She refuted this falsehood as distinctly as she had disproved other calumnious allegations of her uncharitableness ; but it is painful to find her obliged to exculpate herself, at a time when her heart was still sore with filial sorrow ; for, on the 9th of December, she received the intelligence of her father's death. It was shortly after that she had to write to Jones the following letter, about the above gross misrepresentation.

*“ Dublin ; January, 1803.*

“ DEAR SIR,

“ The candour and generosity with which you were so good as to acknowledge the truth asserted in my letter to you, respecting the Lying-in Hospital, encourages me to hope that

you would forward any means of my public justification. I find that the publication of this letter is universally expected, and, as you yourself so kindly yesterday suggested this as the most effectual measure of effecting that purpose, I beg you will do me the favour of returning that letter to me, as I have only an imperfect copy of it, (which I would not willingly present to the public,) if you have not destroyed it. It is hard to bear at one and the same time the pressure of domestic sorrow, the anxiety of business, and the necessity of healing a wounded reputation; but such is the rude enforcement of the time, and I must sustain it as I am enabled by that Power who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

“ Yours sincerely,

“ S. SIDDONS.”

On the 2d of February she had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Sally, describing herself as well and gay. A few days afterwards,

her grief at the prospect of a long separation from her son George was soothed by his coming to visit her before his departure for India. He stopped with her a fortnight. When it came to the last, his affection, and fear of over-agitating his mother, would not allow him to take a formal farewell of her. George had recommendations from Royalty itself to the Governor-General of India, almost amounting to a command to provide for him handsomely ; and the boy's prospects were so hopeful and ambitious, that she resigned herself as cheerfully as she could to an event that was to make him happy. "It was gratifying," Miss Wilkinson says, "to see them fondly trying to make all the happiness they could out of the last days of their domestication, though their mutual smiles were often more affecting than any tears."

Hitherto none of her correspondents had alarmed her about Sally; and Mr. Siddons himself seems to have participated in the general

and fallacious security respecting her. Mrs. Siddons, therefore, made an engagement, that, on leaving Dublin, she should perform at Cork, and she repaired thither in March. On the 10th of that month Mr. Siddons communicated, in a letter to Miss Wilkinson, that Sally was very poorly, but charged her not to disturb Mrs. Siddons with the intelligence. Miss Wilkinson, however, thought it her duty to shew the letter to Mrs. Siddons, who would have instantly set off for England if the winds had permitted her. But the equinoctial gales had set in, and no vessel durst venture out of the harbour. Two days later a letter came to Mrs. Siddons herself, from her husband, requesting her to set her mind at ease with regard to Sally, and to proceed to Cork. She obeyed his injunction, and acted at the theatre there on the 21st of March, but in a state of miserable anxiety, as may be seen by the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

*“ Cork ; March 21, 1803.*

**“ MY DEAR FRIEND,**

“ How shall I sufficiently thank you for all your kindness to me ? You know my heart, and I may spare my words ; for, God knows, my mind is in so distracted a state, that I can hardly write or speak rationally. Oh ! why did not Mr. Siddons tell me when she was first taken so ill ? I should then have got clear of this engagement, and what a world of wretchedness and anxiety would have been spared to me ! And yet, good God ! how should I have crossed the sea ? For a fortnight past it has been so dangerous, that nothing but wherries have ventured to the Holy Head ; but, yet, I think I should have put myself into one of them, if I could have known that my poor dear girl was so ill. Oh ! tell me all about her. I am almost broken-hearted, though the last accounts tell me that she has been mending for several days. Has she wished for me ? but I

know, I feel, that she has. The dear creature used to think it weakness in me, when I told her of the possibility of what might be endured from illness, when that tremendous element divides one from one's family. Would to God I were at her bedside! It would be for me then to suffer with resignation what I cannot now support with any fortitude. If anything could relieve the misery I feel, it would be that my dear and inestimable Sir Lucas Pepys had her under his care. Pray tell him this, and ask him to write me a word of comfort. Will you believe that I must play to-night, and can you imagine any wretchedness like it in this terrible state of mind? For a moment I comfort myself by reflecting on the strength of the dear creature's constitution, which has so often rallied, to the astonishment of us all, under similar serious attacks. Then again, when I think of the frail tenure of human existence, my heart fails, and sinks into dejection. God bless you! The suspense that distance keeps

me in you may imagine, but it cannot be described.

“ Adieu, your ever affectionate,

“ S. S.”

For several succeeding days her agony was wound up to the highest pitch by the non-arrival of letters from home. Mrs. Fitz Hugh had written to her duly, and so had Mr. Siddons, but, owing to the stormy state of the weather the Cork packet arrived irregularly. At last, in the course of a week, she received tidings that were not favourable, though at the same time *not* desperate; but she could endure her apprehensions no longer, and determined immediately to return to England. She told Mr. Pero, the Manager of the Cork theatre, that she was utterly unable to finish her engagement, and he assented to her renouncing it, though it was a great loss to him, in the most humane and honourable manner. She and Miss Wilkinson accordingly set off for Dublin,



being informed that it was a safer route to England than direct from Cork. In Dublin they were again detained by contrary winds, and, as if every circumstance had conspired to make her miserable, Mrs. Siddons found no intelligence respecting her daughter awaiting her arrival there. Her announcement of her intention to leave Cork not having reached Mrs. Fitz Hugh in due time, her friend had still addressed her letters to the South. Mrs. Siddons therefore writes to that friend in a tone of impatience too excusable under such excruciating circumstances.

*“ Dublin ; April 2, 1803.*

“ I am perfectly astonished, my dear friend, that I have not heard from you, after begging it so earnestly. Good God! what can be the reason that intelligence must be extorted, as it were, in circumstances like mine. One would think common benevolence, setting affection quite aside, might have induced some of you

to alleviate, as much as possible, such distress as you know I must feel. The last letter from Mr. Siddons stated that she was better. Another letter, from Mr. Montgomery, at Oxford, says that George gave him the same account. Why, why am I to hear this only from a person at that distance from her, and so ill informed as the writer must be of the state of her health? Why should not you or Mr. Siddons have told me this? I cannot account for your silence at all, for you know how to feel. I hope to sail to-night, and to reach London the third day: God knows when that will be. Oh God! what a home to return to, after all I have been doing! and what a prospect to the end of my days!

“Yours ever,

“S. S.”

As soon as the weather would permit, she crossed to Holyhead, and proceeded to Shrewsbury as fast as she could find conveyances.

There she met with a letter from Mr. Siddons, acknowledging Sally's danger, and affectionately sharing her parental feelings; but also praying her to remember the preciousness of her own life, and not to endanger it by over-rapid travelling. Only an hour or two after this letter had been written her daughter's sufferings had come suddenly to a close; and, whilst she was reading it, a person, recently arrived from London, sent to call Miss Wilkinson out of the room, and to tell her that Miss Siddons was dead. Her faithful friend would have fain broken the news upon Mrs. Siddons gradually, but her countenance betrayed her; and the bereaved mother, having now no occasion for rapid travelling, sank into speechless despondency, and lay for a day at Shrewsbury, (Miss Wilkinson says, in her Diary,) cold and torpid as a stone, and with scarcely a sign of life.

She proceeded at last on her journey to London. At Oxford she found a condoling

letter awaiting her, from her brother John; and a few miles from town she was met by her brother Charles, who accompanied her next day on her first visit to their widowed mother. The agitation of her mind produced a severe indisposition, for which the air and waters of Cheltenham were recommended. From that place she dates the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

*"Birch Farm, Cheltenham; June, 1803.*

"The serenity of the place, the sweet air and scenery of my cottage, and the medicinal effect of the waters, have done some good to my shattered constitution. \* \* \*

"I am unable, at times, to reconcile myself to my fate. The darling being for whom I mourn is assuredly released from a life of suffering, and numbered among the blessed spirits made perfect. But to be separated for ever, in spite of reason, and in spite of religion, is, at

times, too much for me. Give my love to dear Charles Moore,\* if you chance to see him. Have you read his beautiful account of my sweet Sally. It is done with a truth and modesty which has given me the sincerest of all pleasures that I am now allowed to feel, and assures me still more than ever that he who could feel and taste such excellence was worthy of the particular regard she had for him.

“Yours very truly,

“S. S.”

---

• To Charles Moore, the brother of General Sir John Moore, I was indebted for my introduction to the acquaintance of Mrs. Siddons and her daughter. I shall never forget the first meeting I had with him after Miss Siddons's death; it was accidentally in the street: he shook hands with me, but could not speak. He gave me his arm, however, and we walked together to his chambers, where he shewed me a bust of Sally Siddons. It scarcely did her justice, to my remembrance. She was not strictly beautiful, but her countenance was like her mother's, with brilliant eyes, and a remarkable mixture of frankness and sweetness in her physiognomy.

During her stay at Birch Farm she was consoled by having her little daughter Cecilia with her, as well as by a visit from Miss Dorothy Place, the dear friend of her lost Sally, who had been with her during all her illness, and had closed her eyes. Her brother, John Kemble, and Charles Moore, also came to her in this retreat; and the whole congenial party left Cheltenham in July, to make an excursion among the scenery of the Wye, which proved of benefit to Mrs. Siddons's spirits. After their tour she paid a visit to Mrs. Fitz Hugh, at Bannisters, and then returned to London, where she made an engagement to act the following winter at Covent Garden.\*

---

\* Mr. Robertson, the Secretary of Covent Garden Theatre, has favoured me with the following information respecting the terms of her engagements at that House.

Of the amount of her salary in 1803 there is no document; but, in 1804 and 5, it was 20*l.* per night.

In 1805-6, she acted on an average of 27*l.* per night.

In 1806-7, she received 30 guineas per night.

In 1810-11, 30 guineas per night; and in 1811-12, 50 guineas per night.

This change of her theatre promised agreeable results to Mrs. Siddons, in which she was not disappointed. John Kemble was here, as he had been at Drury Lane, both actor and acting Manager; but he was not at Covent Garden subjected to rapacious alienations of the payment due to himself and his fellow performers; for Harris, as the managing proprietor, was honourably punctual. On the other hand, Covent Garden Theatre was immediately and well rewarded by the profits that accrued from the united talents of the Kemble and the Siddons, and the addition of sixteen private boxes to those that were taken by the aristocracy, at the rent of 300*l.* a year, was a flattering earnest of what this new connexion would achieve.

She made her first appearance after this engagement at Covent Garden, as *Isabella*, in the "Fatal Marriage," on the 27th of September, 1803. On the 6th of the following month she

acted *Lady Randolph*; and her son Henry was the *Douglas*, and Kemble took *Old Norval*.

She made her *Elvira* no less popular at Covent Garden than it had been at the other theatre, and she performed it oftener than any other character during the season. On the first night, however, that "Pizarro" was produced at the former house, considerable embarrassment was occasioned by the inability of the actor Cooke to articulate his part. He made matters worse by attempting to say, in the way of apology, "*Ladies and gentlemen, my old complaint.*" On his removal from the stage, Henry Siddons read his part, and so well as to gain much credit. Mrs. Siddons had no new character this season, nor indeed ever afterwards; but, from September, 1803, to May, 1804, she made the amazing exertion of performing sixty nights.\*

---

\* She acted *Isabella* five times; *Lady Randolph*, once; *Mrs. Haller*, three times; *Elvira*, twelve; *Mrs.*



At the conclusion of the season, she went, with Miss Wilkinson, on a visit to her friend, Mrs. Damer, at Strawberry Hill. This lady, like her illustrious guest, was fond of sculpture, and, having no other occupation to engross her time, she was a more skilful artist. A specimen of her statuary stands on the staircase of the British Museum. At Strawberry Hill, during Mrs. Siddons's residence, the Duke of Orleans, now King of the French, and his Royal Highness the Prince Regent, were occasional visitors. It is creditable to the memory of the latter, that he never met our great actress without shewing peculiar and marked respect for her. She was never at Brighton, when the

---

*Beverley*, five; *Calista*, four; *Belvidera*, six; *Isabella*, in "Measure for Measure," two; *Lady Macbeth*, seven; *Hermione*, ("Distressed Mother,") two; *Jane Shore*, one; *Queen Mary*, one; *Desdemona*, six; *Constance*, two; *Grecian Daughter*, one; *Zara*, (in the "Mourning Bride,") two.

Prince was there, without being a guest at the Pavilion.

At the close of the summer she had a severe attack of lumbago, and, for the sake of country air, she removed from Marlborough street to a cottage at Hampstead. Mr. Siddons and she were now, by a sad fatality, invalids with the same rheumatic affection. Their new abode, on the day of their arrival, much delighted the old gentleman. He ate his dinner with uncommon relish, and, looking out at the beautiful prospect, said, "Sally, this will cure all our ailments." But he was mistaken, for Mrs. Siddons was confined for weeks to her bed with extreme suffering. She tried, at last, the effect of electricity, and it proved beneficial, but the agony of the operation was excruciating. The touch of the sparks made her feel as if burning lead had been running through her veins, and extorted such shrieks from her, that Mr. Siddons said he was afraid of the people

from without bursting into the house, under the idea that murder was going on.

Before the winter set in, she was relieved from pain, and they returned to town; but Mr. Siddons having relapsed, whilst she recovered, he resolved once more to try the waters of Bath for his rheumatism; and, as Mrs. Siddons and Miss Wilkinson had no occasion for so large a house as that in Marlborough street, she parted with it, and took lodgings in Prince's street, Hanover square. Her landlord was an upholsterer of the name of Nixon. He and his wife, at this day, mention their illustrious tenant with a devotion like that of Catholics speaking of a saint; and they dwell particularly on the suavity of her temper. One day, looking at her landlord's card, she found that the upholsterer was also an undertaker, and she said laughingly, "Well then, Mr. Nixon, I bespeak you to bury me." Twenty-seven years afterwards Mr. Nixon conducted her funeral.

Mrs. Siddons's health, though she had recovered from excessive agony, was certainly very feeble during the winter and spring of 1804-5, and she performed only twice at Covent Garden in the whole course of the season. Yet I suspect that bad health was not the only cause of her absence from the stage. This was the season when Master Betty made his first appearance on the London boards, and was equally the magnet of attraction at each of the great Theatres. The popularity of that baby-faced boy, who possessed not even the elements of a good actor, was an hallucination in the public mind, and a disgrace to our theatrical history. It enabled Managers to give him sums for his childish ranting that were never accorded to the acting of a Garrick or a Siddons. His bust was stuck up in marble by the best sculptors; he was painted by Opie and Northcote; and the verses that were poured out upon him were in a style of idolatrous adulation. Actors and

actresses of merit were obliged to appear on the stage with this minion, and even to affect the general taste for him, in order to avoid giving offence. But Mrs. Siddons never condescended to act with him, nor even concealed her disgust at the popular infatuation. She went to see him, however, and gave him all the praise that he deserved. At the end of the play, the late Lord Abercorn came into her box, and told her that that boy, Betty, would eclipse everything which had been called acting in England. "My lord," she answered, "he is a very clever, pretty boy, but nothing more."

## CHAPTER XII.

## CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons removes her abode to Westbourne—Mr. Siddons's Verses on the same—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to her son Henry, from Broadstairs—Characters she played in 1806-7 at Covent Garden—Mr. Siddons's Death—Mrs. Siddons's Letter to Mrs. Piozzi on the event—The Burning of Covent Garden Theatre—Re-building of the House, and the O.P. Riots—Letter to Mrs. Siddons from Mr. Jekyll—Another from Hannah More—Mrs. Siddons takes her Farewell of the Stage.

## CHAPTER XII.

IN the April of 1805, Mrs. Siddons took possession of a pleasant cottage at Westbourne, near Paddington, which she furnished for her permanent residence. It was small, but contained more accommodation than its appearance indicated. With the aid of her trusty upholsterer, Nixon, she fitted it up very elegantly, built an additional room for a studio, and laid out the shrubbery and garden with great taste. She was surrounded with fresh air and green fields, and describes herself as delighted with her retreat. Mr. Siddons passed some weeks at Westbourne; but his infirm health obliged him to make arrangements for having a permanent



establishment at Bath, as he found no relief from rheumatism anywhere else. To Mrs. Siddons's constitution the sultry summer air of that place was noxiously relaxing, and her profession put it out of the question as a winter sojourn. She went, however, as often as her health and avocations would permit her, to join her husband, at Bath; and their partial separation, if such it could be called, was one of convenience, if not of absolute necessity.

Mr. Boaden, in his *Life of the Great Woman*, has described this parting, as if it had been a formal one, occasioned by incompatibility of temper. I find no fault with him for having done so, for he only credited the prevailing, though false rumour to that effect; and because he has also with justice and propriety recorded the fact, that Mr. Siddons, by the last solemn act of his life, demonstrated the honour and esteem in which he had held his partner. But the report that they were separated from alienation,

was absolutely unfounded. Mr. Siddons was obliged to be at Bath, on account of his health, and Mrs. Siddons to be in London, on account of her profession. They lived as much together as circumstances would permit during the rest of Mr. Siddons's life; and I would ask any candid person if he can find the slightest symptom of unfriendly feelings between them in the following verses, which Mr. Siddons wrote?

## ON MRS. SIDDONS'S COTTAGE AT WESTBOURNE.

## 1.

Would you I'd Westbourne Farm describe,  
I'll do it then, and free from gall,  
For sure it would be sin to gibe  
A thing so pretty and so small.

## 2.

The poplar walk, if you have strength,  
Will take a minute's time to step it;  
Nay, certes, 'tis of such a length,  
'Twould almost tire a frog to leap it.

## 3.

But when the pleasure-ground is seen,  
Then what a burst comes on the view ;  
Its level walk, its shaven green,  
For which a razor's stroke would do.

## 4.

Now, pray be cautious when you enter,  
And curb your strides from much expansion ;  
Three paces take you to the centre,  
Three more, you're close against the mansion.

## 5.

The mansion, cottage, house, or hut,  
Call't what you will, has room within  
To lodge the king of Lilliput,  
But not his court, nor yet his queen.

## 6.

The kitchen-garden, true to keeping,  
Has length and breadth and width so plenty,  
A snail, if fairly set a-creeping,  
Could scarce go round while you told twenty.

## 7.

Perhaps you'll cry, on hearing this,  
What! every thing so very small ?  
No, she that made it what it is,  
Has greatness that makes up for all.

Let the reader judge for himself whether these verses be in the style of a man parting from his wife on unpleasant terms.

If I had met with allusions to the alleged infelicity of Mrs. Siddons as a married woman, in any unfriendly account of her Life, I should have passed them over in silence; but Mr. Boaden has taken up the subject; and he treats it not only like a gentleman, but with an air of sincere belief, so that I can scarcely avoid it, although I feel it to be a matter of delicate animadversion. That Mr. and Mrs. Siddons never had any petty disputes in the whole course of their conjugal union, is more than I would undertake to affirm of them, or of nine tenths of all the wedded pairs that ever existed; but I speak my sincere belief, when I say that they never had any differences sufficient to interfere substantially with their firm and mutual regard. If it be asked why I express myself so confidently on this subject,

I have to answer, that I derive my belief from the earnest assurance of one who lived under their roof for many years, and who was on the most amicable terms with both of them. When there is any real unhappiness between man and wife, and when the latter has any peculiarly confidential friend, I look on the probability of the husband disliking, if not cordially detesting that confidential friend of his wife, as amounting to moral certainty. Now, Miss Wilkinson stood exactly in that relation to the Great Woman. She was to her as an adopted daughter. But what was the conduct of Mr. Siddons to this dearest favourite of his wife? He was invariably kind to her; and his letters bespeak a frank and almost paternal fondness. I knew Mr. Siddons only when he was old and a suffering invalid, but he was even then remarkably gentlemanlike and gracious; and I never recall those delightful evenings at Marlborough street, which brought me some of the dearest friends and happiest

hours of my whole existence, without remembering that the great woman's queen-mother-like welcome was enhanced by her husband's urbanity. He was remarkably full of anecdote.

Among the letters of Mrs. Siddons, I have found the following, which, though it alludes to a transient difference, shows that their conjugal disputes were of no exasperated nature.

*"December 16, 1804.*

*"MY DEAR SID.,\**

*"I am really sorry that my little flash of merriment should have been taken so seriously, for I am sure, however we may differ in trifles,*

---

\* This was her usual style of contracting his name, in speaking or writing to him.

*we can never cease to love each other.* You wish me to say what I expect to have done—I can expect nothing more than you yourself have designed me in your will. Be (as you ought to be) the master of all while God permits, but, in case of your death, only let me be put out of the power of any person living. This is all that I desire; and I think that you cannot but be convinced that it is reasonable and proper.

“Your ever affectionate and faithful

“S. S.”

During the summer of 1805 she professionally visited both the Scottish and Irish capitals, with her usual applause and success; and, returning to London, she acted thirty-nine times\*

---

\* *Isabella*, ten times; *Queen Katharine*, eight; *Mrs. Beverley*, four; *Jane Shore*, twice; *Mrs. Haller*, twice; *Calista*, once; *Euphrasia*, once; *Lady Macbeth*, eight; *Belvidera*, three; *Elvira*, six times.

at Covent Garden, during the season 1805-6, but only in her accustomed characters.

In theatrical life Mrs. Siddons had now ceased to assume any fresh part ; but, in 1806, I find her fulfilling, in real life, the new character of a grandmother with all the truth and benignity that belonged to her nature. From Broadstairs she writes to her son Henry, on the 6th of August of that year :

“MY DEAR HARRY,

“I have very great pleasure in telling you that your dear little ones are quite well. The bathing agrees with them perfectly. They are exceedingly improved in looks and appetite, though their stomachs turn a little, poor dears, at the sight of the machines; but indeed, upon the whole, the dipping is pretty well got over, and they look so beautiful after it, it would do your heart good to see them. I assure you they



are the belles of Broadstairs. Their nurse is very good-humoured to them. She is certainly not a beauty, but they like her as well as if she were a Venus. Never were little souls so easily managed, or so little troublesome. They are very fond of Patty—I'm afraid they don't like me so well, for I am not half so good a play-fellow as Patty or their grandfather. Accept, and present to dear Harriet, our united loves, and believe me, my dear Harry,

“Your affectionate mother,

“S. S.”

In her season of 1806-7, at Covent Garden, she played *Queen Katharine* seven times; *Lady Macbeth* (to Cooke's *Macbeth*,) five times; *Isabella* (“Fatal Marriage,”) twice; *Elvira* twice; *Lady Randolph* once; *Mrs. Beverley* once; *Euphrasia* once; and *Volumnia* fifteen times. It is pleasant to perceive in this list Shakespeare's dramatic popularity keeping ahead of Sheridan's. The part of *Cordelia*

she now gave up to Miss Smith, since Mrs. Bartley. The young Roscius was no longer the idol of London; but it would seem that he was still much run after in the provincial theatres, from what she writes to her friend the following summer, dating

*“ Liverpool ;*

*July 15, 1807.*

“The houses are tolerably good. I can't expect to be followed like the great genius, Master Betty, you know; but I hope to put about 1000*l.* into my pocket this summer. 'Tis better to work hard for a short time, and have done with it. If I can but add three hundred a-year to my present income, I shall be perfectly well provided for; and I am resolved, when that is accomplished, to make no more positive engagements in summer. I trust that God in his great mercy will enable me to do it; and then, oh, how lazy, and saucy, and

happy will I be. You will have something to do, I can tell you, my dear, to keep me in order.

“ Yours,

“ S. S.”

Her subsequent season, at Covent Garden, was uncommonly short, and extended only to the 11th of December, 1807, when the “ Winter’s Tale” was announced, for her last appearance before Easter. It proved, eventually, to be her last for the season. Immediately after the performance, she set off for Bath, where she spent six weeks with Mr. Siddons. The state of his health was so tolerable, that he promised to spend a part of the ensuing summer at Westbourne; so that she left him without apprehensions, in February, 1808. But, within a month from the time of her departure, he was seized very suddenly with his last illness, and expired on the 11th of March. When the intelligence of his death came to her, in Edinburgh, it of course put a stop to her performances, and,

as soon as she was able to travel, she returned to Westbourne. From thence she writes to Mrs. Piozzi.

*“Westbourne Farm ;*

*“ March 29, 1808.*

“ How unwearied is your goodness to me, my dear friend, \* \* \*. There is something so awful in this sudden dissolution of so long a connexion, that I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest worthy husband, and may those to whom I am dear remember me when I am gone, as I remember him, forgetting and forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart. Remember me to your dear Mr. Piozzi. My head is still so dull with this stunning surprise, that I cannot see what I write. Adieu, dear soul ; do not cease to love your friend,

“ S. S.”

1808.  
~~~~

After her customary summer visit to her friends, the Fitz Hughs, at Bannisters, she returned to her professional duties, in September; but she had acted only a few nights, when that dreadful accident took place, by which the theatre of Covent Garden was burnt to the ground. It was generally attributed to the wadding of a gun, that was discharged in the performance of "Pizarro," having lodged unperceived in some crevice of the scenery. Miss Wilkinson says, that before the audience left the house, she perceived a strong smell of fire whilst she was sitting in Mr. Kemble's box, and spoke of it to several of the servants as she was passing to Mrs. Siddons's dressing-room; but they said that it was only the smell of the lamps in the front of the stage. About four o'clock on the morning of the 20th of September this noble building, which was erected in the year 1733, and enlarged, with considerable alterations, in 1792, was seen suddenly to be on fire: the flames continued to rage so fiercely, that in three hours

the whole interior of the theatre, with the scenery, wardrobe, musical and dramatic libraries, &c., became a heap of smoking ruins. The loss of property of all descriptions, including that of the organ, bequeathed to the house by Handel, and of the unpublished ms. music of first-rate composers, was estimated at 150,000*l*.

But the damage done to property by that dreadful event was light in comparison with the horrors which it occasioned by human deaths and sufferings. A number of firemen were crushed under the falling-in of the burning roof, and several unfortunate individuals, having approached the conflagration too nearly, were scalded to death by the steam of the water that arose from it. I shudder in calculating the number of victims—they must have amounted to thirty! Many of them were dug out of the ruins in such a state that they could not be identified.

The performances of the Covent Garden company were transferred first to the Opera House, and afterwards to the Haymarket Theatre. It was one of our actress's busiest seasons. Between September 12, 1808, and May 6, 1809, she performed forty times.* Mr. Young made his first appearance, this season, as *Macbeth*, and as *Beverley*. She acted with him on both occasions, and in more than one of her letters to her friends alludes to him as an actor of invaluable acquisition to the British stage.

In the summer I find her paying another visit to Scotland, and writing with more than usual vivacity about the agreeableness of her Northern friends. She mentions particularly her happiness in frequently meeting with Henry

* *Lady Macbeth*, fifteen times; *Belvidera*, once; *Isabella*, once; *Elvira*, once; *Lady Randolph*, once; *Euphrasia*, once; *Mrs. Haller*, three; *Mrs. Beverley*, nine; *Zara*, ("Mourning Bride"), three; *Queen Katharine*, seven.

Erskine, Walter Scott, James Ballantyne, and the amiable Stirlings of Drumpella, with whom she resided for some time, at their seat, near Glasgow. Returning home by way of the Lakes, she stopped for several days at Low-wood, on the borders of Windermere, enchanted by the beautiful scenery. The learned Bishop of Llandaff, who was in the neighbourhood, failed not to pay his respects to her.

Covent Garden Theatre arose from its ashes a more splendid building than it had ever been, and it was re-opened on the 18th of September, 1809, exactly two days less than a twelvemonth from the time of its destruction.* The O.P.

* I subjoin the following extract from an account of the O. P. riots, published by Stockdale, and entitled the "*Covent Garden Journal, September 18.*"

"At four o'clock of that evening, every avenue to the house was besieged by numerous crowds, manifesting the most eager impatience for the opening of the doors. In front of the Bow street arcade the blockading party determined on a *coup de main*, and actually stormed

riots, which lasted for weeks after the first occupation of the house, must be remembered by all the adults of the present generation. There can be little doubt that these disturbances were but an indirect re-action on that injustice which invests our great theatres with their monopolies; but still the outrages, considered in themselves, were lawless and disgusting. If the claimants of old prices thought themselves aggrieved, their only equitable

and carried by escalade the iron railing which separated them from the land of promise.

“ The interior of the house was brilliantly lighted up, and served most impressively to display the beauteous order of the edifice, raised, by the creative power of the architect, from a late dismal chaos. The groups of admiring spectators, as they entered, burst into the warmest expressions of applause; and, for some time, no sentiment obtruded but that of self-complacency, and the satisfaction arising from novel enjoyment. Before six, the house was overflowing full, and yet at least three times the number of those admitted, remained in the entrances and lobbies, making vain endeavours to obtain farther entrance.

recourse was to have kept away from the theatre; for they had no more right to extort terms from the proprietors by personal threats, by injuring the furniture of the house, and by howlings, savage dances, and dust-bells, than they had to terrify the bakers by similar means into the sale of cheaper bread. These riots excluded our great actress from the stage for the greater part of the season. During this forced vacation, she writes to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh :

“ Mr. Kemble made his appearance in the costume of *Macbeth*, and amidst volleys of hissing, hooting, groans, and catcalls. He made an address, but it was impossible to hear it. His attitudes were imploring, but in vain. * * The play proceeded in pantomime ; not a word was heard, save now and then the deeply modulated tones of the bewitching Siddons. On her entrance she seemed disturbed by the clamour, but in the progressive stages of her action she went through her part with wonderful composure. Kemble appeared greatly agitated, yet in no instance did his trouble interrupt him in carrying on ‘ *the cunning of the scene*.’ Perhaps a finer dumb shew was never witnessed.”

“ December 2.

“ I am quite vexed, my dear, with Miss L. for giving you such an account of me. My appearance of illness was occasioned entirely by an agitating visit that morning from poor Mr. John Kemble, on account of the giving up of the private boxes, which, I fear, must be at last complied with. Surely nothing ever equalled the domineering of the mob in these days. It is to me inconceivable how the public at large submits to be thus dictated to, against their better judgment, by a handful of imperious and intoxicated men. In the meantime, what can the poor proprietors do, but yield to overwhelming necessity ?

“ Could I once feel that my poor brother's anxiety about the Theatre was at an end, I should be, marvellous to say, as well as I ever was in my life. But only conceive what a state he must have been in, however good a face he might put upon the business, for upwards of

three months; and think what his poor wife and I must have suffered, when, for weeks together, such were the outrages committed on his house and otherwise, that I trembled for even his personal safety: she, poor soul, living with ladders at her windows, in order to make her escape through the garden, in case of an attack. Mrs. Kemble tells me his nerves are much shaken. What a time it has been with us all, beginning with fire, and continued with fury! Yet sweet sometimes are the uses of adversity. They not only strengthen family affection, but teach us all to walk humbly with our God.

“Yours,

“S. S.”

The season 1810-11 might well be remembered in the life of John Kemble, for the new popularity which he gained in acting *Cato*, but in this penultimate year of Mrs. Siddons's professional history, she supported her re-

putation without any particularly memorable occurrence.

In the course of the year I find she received two letters, which, though they contain no matter of importance, I insert, merely because they shew the variety of character in the persons who prided themselves in her good opinion. Few portfolios, perhaps, ever contained the letters of two individuals more unlike than Mr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hannah More.

“ Spring Gardens ;

“ Nov. 13, 1811.

“ DEAR MRS. SIDDONS,

“ If I had been bred on the Rialto, and your precious note were negotiable, in spite of Lord Stanhope’s Bill, I would engage to get it discounted for three thousand ducats by any Christian man of taste and talent. Why have you not patriotism enough to teach the Bank

Directors how to issue paper which may defy depreciation? But, on Thursday next, I must be fortunate.

“ You are my neighbour too. Better and better. I need not

‘ Build me
A willow cabin at your gate.’

We will have talk, and good talk, and as much nonsense too as we had at the Countess Dowager's of Cork and Orrery. And you shall not talk in your sleep, as you used to do at Dunsinane. And I won't talk as if to put people to sleep, which I do in Westminster Hall; but we will both talk broad awake, and rail at Cardinals, and at Lord Angelo, and at Lord Ellenborough; for, thanks to some one or other of them, I suppose we shall hardly ever meet, either night or morning.

“ Believe me, dear Mrs. Siddons, with a

thousand thanks for your continual remembrance of me,

“ Most truly and gratefully yours,

“ JOSEPH JEKYLL.”

The other epistle was occasioned by its writer having sent Mrs. Siddons a copy of one of her works, most probably her “ Sacred Dramas.”

“ *Barley Wood ;*

“ *Dec. 14, 1811.*

“ MY DEAR MADAM,

“ I cannot refuse myself the gratification of returning you my sincere thanks for your very interesting and obliging letter, the piety of which delighted me still more than the kindness. Though the current of life has carried us different ways, and I have had the happiness of so little personal intercourse with you, yet I have been long assured that ‘ your ear was patient of a serious song.’ The serious spirit which pervades your letter is a strong confirmation

of the opinion I have been long led to entertain of your devout disposition. Oh! my dear madam, there is no other lasting good,—no other solid peace, no other final consolation. This has doubtless been your refuge and your preservation from the perils of the deserved praise and admiration which your extraordinary talents have so eminently obtained. I have heard that you consider the Bible as your treasure. May it continue to be your guide through life, and your support in that inevitable hour which awaits us all.

“ It has pleased God to bless my little book with a degree of success which I had no reason to expect ; but I can truly say, that among the favourable testimonies which kindness and partiality have bestowed on it, there is not one that has so highly gratified me as that of Mrs. Siddons. Believe me, my dear madam, with real regard,

“ Your affectionate friend,

“ HANNAH MORE.”

Mrs. Siddons, in several of her Letters, speaks with some impatience of her fatiguing theatrical duties, and of the gladness which it would give her to find repose from them. I fully believe in the sincerity of her declarations to this effect, though they are strongly contrasted with other feelings, which obviously arose in her mind, at the nearer prospect of bidding a last farewell to her profession. It is a part of our nature to cherish successive wishes, which, though natural in their time and turn, seem contradictory on revised comparison. In our longings for ease we forget the *ennui* that attends inaction; but the mind takes a different view of the matter, at the real arrival of the moment when "Othello's occupation" must be gone. This was strongly the case with Mrs. Siddons, and I find her alluding, in her letters, to the prospect of quitting the stage, more gravely than she had ever descanted upon its fatigues.

To Mrs. Piozzi she writes: "In this last sea-

son of my acting, I feel as if I were mounting the first step of a ladder conducting me to the other world." It is natural for great players, whose posthumous and present fame are so sadly unequal, to part from their profession with more regret than other inspired artists, whose compositions may bespeak a place for them in human memories, when they shall be no more.

Mrs. Siddons, however, was sensible that a great theatrical career ought to terminate whilst the actor's powers are undiminished, like the sun setting in a tropical sky, without a twilight. She obviously made a mighty effort to render the season of her departure splendidly memorable. She performed fifty-seven times,* and in fourteen different characters, among which, independ-

* She performed, in 1811-12, *Lady Macbeth* ten times; *Mrs. Beverley*, four; *Lady Constance*, four; *Elvira*, five; *Euphrasia*, twice; *Queen Katharine*, six; *Isabella*, ("Fatal Marriage,") twice; *Isabella*, ("Measure for Measure,") seven; *Belvidera*, six; *Hermione*, four; *Volumnia*, four; *Mrs. Haller*, twice.

ently of those which suited her years, she blended many parts of younger heroines, and gave them a charm that was absolutely marvellous in the person of an actress of fifty-six.

She took her professional farewell of the stage on the 29th of June, 1812.* The play was "Macbeth." At an early hour a vast crowd assembled around the theatre of Covent Garden, and, when the doors were opened, the

* Mrs. Siddons was solicited in the strongest manner to return to the stage professionally, but she had the sense to refuse. Return she did for a few nights, but it could not be called professionally. May 25, 1813, she acted gratis for the Theatrical Fund. Drury Lane, June 22, she acted for the same charity. June 11, 1813, at Covent Garden, for Charles Kemble's benefit. At Edinburgh, November 1815, ten times, for the family of her deceased son. May 31, 1816, at Covent Garden, for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. C. Kemble. June 8 and 22, 1816, by the express desire of the Princess Charlotte. June 29, for the Theatrical Fund. June 5, 1817, for Charles Kemble's benefit. June 9, 1819, for the benefit of Mr. and Mrs. C. Kemble.

struggle for places became a service of danger. After the sleep-walking scene, in the tragedy, the applause of the spectators became ungovernable: they stood on the benches, and demanded that the performance of the piece should not go further than the last scene in which she appeared. As this wish seemed to be felt by the great majority, the actor Chapman came forward, and signified that it should be complied with. The curtain was dropped for twenty minutes; after which it rose, and discovered Mrs. Siddons sitting at a table, dressed simply in white. She came forward amidst the most fervent acclamations, which for several minutes prevented her from speaking. When silence was obtained, she delivered, with modest dignity, but with much emotion, the following Address, written for the occasion, by her nephew, Horace Twiss,

FAREWELL ADDRESS,

SPOKEN BY MRS. SIDDONS, ON LEAVING THE STAGE,

29th of June, 1812.

Who has not felt, how growing use endears
The fond remembrance of our former years ?
Who has not sigh'd, when doom'd to leave at last
The hopes of youth, the habits of the past,
The thousand ties and interests, that impart
A second nature to the human heart,
And, wreathing round it close, like tendrils, climb,
Blooming in age, and sanctified by time ?

Yes ! at this moment crowd upon my mind
Scenes of bright days for ever left behind,
Bewildering visions of enraptur'd youth,
When hope and fancy wore the hues of truth,
And long-forgotten years, that almost seem
The faded traces of a morning dream !
Sweet are those mournful thoughts : for they renew
The pleasing sense of all I owe to you,
For each inspiring smile, and soothing tear—
For those full honours of my long career,
That cheer'd my earliest hope, and chas'd my latest fear !

And tho', for me, those tears shall flow no more,
And the warm sunshine of your smile is o'er,—
Tho' the bright beams are fading fast away
That shone unclouded through my summer day,—
Yet, grateful Memory shall reflect their light
O'er the dim shadows of the coming night,
And lend to later life a softer tone,
A moonlight tint,—a lustre of her own.

Judges and Friends ! to whom the magic strain
Of Nature's feeling never spoke in vain,
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
May think on her, whose lips have pour'd so long
The charmed sorrows of your Shakespeare's song :—
On her, who parting to return no more,
Is now the mourner she but seem'd before,—
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last
Farewell !

Her utterance was interrupted by strong agitation towards the conclusion of the Address, and, when it was ended, Mr. Kemble led her off the stage, amidst the deepest manifestations of public feeling.

During this season Mrs. Siddons removed from Westbourne, and lived for some months, in lodgings, in Pall Mall. I remember, when I called to pay my respects to her, I was struck at seeing a long line of carriages that filled the street, and I concluded that there was a levee at St. James's. I soon found, however, that the carriages belonged to the visitants of the Tragic Queen.

CHAPTER XIII.

CONTENTS.

Mrs. Siddons reads to the Royal Family at Windsor
—Has her Likeness taken by the Painter Harlowe
—Her Readings at the Argyle Rooms—Visits, by
Invitation, the Universities of Oxford and Cam-
bridge.—Her Tour to Paris—She visits the Louvre—
Death of her Son Henry—Acts at Edinburgh for the
benefit of his surviving Family—Re-appears on the
Stage, by command of the Princess Charlotte—Her
last Performance, for the benefit of Mr. Charles
Kemble—Joins her Brother John, at Lausanne—Mrs.
Garrick's Bequest to her—Mrs. Siddons's gratification
at Fanny Kemble's performance—Her last Illness,
Death, and Funeral—General Eulogium on her
Character.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. SIDDONS had not been many months retired from the stage when she received an invitation from the Royal Family to visit Windsor, an incident respecting which she sends the following account to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

“Westbourne ; January 26, 1813.

“I have been these three days meditating about writing you an account of my Windsor visit, which you have, no doubt, seen mentioned in the newspapers ; but, whether occasioned by the fatigue of that visit, or from an habitual tendency, my head has been more heavy and

painful since my return home than it has been for many months; but, though very far from well at present, I cannot resist the pleasure of telling you myself what I know you will be gratified to hear.—Take it thus verbatim.

“On the 18th (I think it was) I was in the middle of dressing to go and dine with Mrs. Damer, when an especial messenger arrived in the dusk, with a letter from my old friend the Dowager Lady Stewart, to tell me that the Queen had ordered her to write and say, ‘that her Majesty wished very much to hear me read, and desired to have an answer returned immediately to Carlton House, where the party from Windsor dined that day,’ which was Wednesday. I of course wrote that I should be happy to have the honor of obeying the Queen’s commands, and therefore left my own house on Friday, according to appointment, and went to Frogmore, where I was informed that every thing would be prepared for my arrival. I got

there about three, and was conducted into a very elegant drawing-room, where I sat till it was time to go to the Castle, and consult with Lady Stewart respecting the reading. I spent about an hour very agreeably in her apartment with herself and Princess Elizabeth, who appears the best natured person in the world. We concluded for some part of 'Henry VIII.' some part of the 'Merchant of Venice,' and to finish with some scenes from 'Hamlet.' After this I dined with Madame Bechendorf, her Majesty's confidential gentlewoman. When Lady Harcourt returned, after dining with the Queen, I again went to her apartment, where Princess Elizabeth renewed her visit, and staid and chatted very charmingly, of course, because her conversation was chiefly about the pleasure they had all formerly received from my exertions, and the delight of hearing me again. We then parted for the night, the ladies to the Queen's card-party, and I to Frogmore, where the steward and housekeeper came to me, to

say that her Majesty and the Princess had been there in the morning, and had left a message, to desire that I would consider myself as in my own house, with repeated injunctions to make my residence there as agreeable as possible. The next day the whole Royal party from Windsor, with Princess Charlotte and the Dukes of Cambridge and Clarence, dined at Frogmore. Many of the gentry and nobility were invited to the reading; and at about half past eight I entered the room, where they were all assembled. The Queen, the Princesses, and the Duchess of York, all came to me, and conversed most graciously, till the Queen took her place. Then the company seated themselves, and I began. It all went off to my heart's content, for the room was the finest place for the voice in the world. I retired, sometimes, at her Majesty's request, to rest; and, when it was over, I had the extreme satisfaction to find that they had been all extremely delighted. Lady Stewart wrote me yesterday,

that I am still the inexhaustible fund of conversation and eulogium. When the Queen retired, after the reading, Lady Stewart brought to me a magnificent gold chain, with a cross of many-coloured jewels, from her Majesty, and hung it about my neck before all the company. This was a great surprize, and you may imagine how so great an honour affected me. You may conceive, too, the pleasure it gave me, to be able to divert a few of those mournfully monotonous hours which these amiable sufferers, from the singularly afflicting nature of their misfortune, are doomed to undergo. I found that the Queen had been desirous that I should not return the next day, but stay, and read again to her at the Castle next night, which I was too happy to do. This reading consisted of passages from 'Paradise Lost,' 'Gray's Elegy,' and 'Marmion.' When I went into the room, I found her Majesty, with all the Princesses, and the Princess Charlotte, seated, and a table and chair prepared for me, which

she (most graciously saying she was sure I must still feel fatigued from the last night's exertion,) ordered me to seat myself in, when I thanked her for the magnificent favour* I had received, and hoped the reading of the preceding night had not fatigued her Majesty, for she really had a terrible cough and cold. She hoped that the keepsake would remind me of Frogmore, and said 'that it was impossible to be fatigued when she was so extremely delighted.' I then took my leave, intending to return home the next day, which was Monday, but, having long meditated a short visit to Lord and Lady Harcourt, who live at St. Leonard's Hill, about four miles from Frogmore, I called there, and Lady Harcourt persuaded me to remain with her, and was so good as to make me send for Cecilia and Miss Wilkinson. While

* In the same year Mrs. Siddons did me the honour of presenting me with a gift, which I would not exchange for even a gold chain from Royalty. It was a silken quilt for my bed, which she sewed with her own hands.

I was there I received another command from her Majesty; and the next Sunday evening I read 'Othello' to the Royal party at the Castle: and here my story ends. I have much to say if I had eyes and head; my heart, however, is still strong, and am, with undiminished affection,

"Yours,

"S. S."

Very soon afterwards she paid a visit to her friends, the Blackshaws, at their seat, in Windsor Forest, where she met with Harlowe the painter, who took an admirable likeness of her, in the Sleeping scene of "Macbeth."

Though she had now professionally bid adieu to the stage, she was bound by no consideration to take an absolute leave of her popularity; and, during the next season, she gave public readings of poetry at the Argyle Rooms, in London.

The style in which these readings were got

up was simple and tasteful :—In front of what was the orchestra in the old Argyle Rooms, a reading-desk with lights was placed, on which lay her book, a quarto volume, printed with large letter. When her memory could not be entirely trusted she assisted her sight by spectacles, which, in the intervals, she handled and waved so gracefully, that you could not have wished her to have been without them. A large red screen formed what painters would call a background to the person of the charming reader. She was dressed in white, and her dark hair, *à la Grecque*, crossed her temples in full masses. There was something remarkably elegant in the self-possession of her entrance, and in the manner in which she addressed the assembly. Her readings were alternately from Milton and Shakespeare. I have already made free to confess my conviction that the works of the former poet are too spiritual and undramatic to be susceptible of any improvement from human elocution. But,

about her readings of Shakespeare, I can only say, that, to my understanding, no acting I ever witnessed, nor dramatic criticism I ever read, illustrated the poet so closely and so perfectly. In the following letter respecting Mrs. Siddons, which I had the honour of receiving from Miss Edgeworth, I am happy to find this pre-eminent writer expressing the same idea.

“DEAR SIR,

“I heard Mrs. Siddons read, at her town-house, a portion of ‘Henry VIII.’ I was more struck and delighted than I ever was with any reading in my life. This is feebly expressing what I felt: I felt that I had never before fully understood or sufficiently admired Shakespeare, or known the full powers of the human voice and the English language. *Queen Katharine* was a character peculiarly suited to her time of life and to reading. There was nothing that required gesture or vehemence incompatible with the sitting attitude. The

composure and dignity, and the sort of suppressed feeling, and touches, not bursts of tenderness, of matronly, not youthful tenderness, were all favourable to the general effect. I quite forgot to applaud—I thought she was what she appeared. The illusion was perfect till it was interrupted by a hint from her daughter or niece, I forget which, that Mrs. Siddons would be encouraged by having some demonstration given of our feelings. I then expressed my admiration ; but the charm was broken,—

‘To Barry we gave loud applause,
To Garrick only tears.’

“Yours, &c.

“M. E.”

Soon after these readings, she received an intimation from the most eminent characters of Oxford and Cambridge, that their respective Universities would feel themselves honoured by her visiting them. This invitation, like that from Royalty, necessarily involved the understanding that its honour was to be its own

reward. She nevertheless accepted it, and went to both places, where she was received with enthusiastic hospitality. Her readings were given at what were called private parties; but which included very numerous audiences, and all the distinguished individuals of the colleges. She might be said to have received the highest honours at both Universities. Miss Siddons thus writes to Miss Wilkinson, respecting her mother's reception at Cambridge.

"Melton Mowbray;

"July 22, 1814.

"MY DEAR PATTY,

"On the delightful days which we have spent at Cambridge I shall always look back with pride and pleasure. I over and over wished for you, who would have enjoyed as much as I did the attention and admiration shewn to our *Darling*. Oxford in term-time did not equal Cambridge in vacation, and was almost empty. Mr. and Mrs. Frere were most hospitable, and

his kindness and *her* singing would have alone made the place agreeable to us. But then we had sights to see—colleges and libraries to examine, and at every one of them there was a principal inhabitant eager to shew, and proud to entertain Mrs. Siddons. In the public library, my mother received the honour of an address from Professor Clarke, who presented her with a handsome Bible from the Stereotype Press. After which she read to almost all the members of the University at present there the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, and more finely she never did it in her life. Every one was, or seemed to be, enchanted and enthusiastic.

“Yours truly,

“C. SIDDONS.”

Early in the autumn of the same year she made an excursion to Paris, in company with her daughter and Miss Wilkinson. I was also one of the many English who availed themselves

of the first short peace to get a sight of the Continent. The Louvre was at that time in possession of its fullest wealth. In the statuary hall of that place I had the honour of giving Mrs. Siddons my arm the first time she walked through it, and the first time in both our lives that we saw the Apollo of Belvidere. From the farthest end of that spacious room, the god seemed to look down like a president on the chosen assembly of sculptured forms, and his glowing marble, unstained by time, appeared to my imagination as if he had stepped freshly from the sun. I had seen casts of the glorious statue with scarcely any admiration; and I must undoubtedly impute that circumstance in part to my inexperience in art, and to my taste having till then lain torpid. But still I prize the recollected impressions of that day too dearly to call them fanciful. They seemed to give my mind a new sense of the harmony of art—a new visual power of enjoying beauty. Nor is it mere fancy that makes the difference

between the Apollo himself and his plaster casts. The dead whiteness of the stucco copies is glaringly monotonous, whilst the diaphanous surface of the original seems to soften the light which it reflects. Every particular feeling of that hour is written indelibly on my memory. I remember entering the Louvre with a latent suspicion on my mind that a good deal of the rapture expressed at the sight of superlative sculptures was exaggerated or affected; but, as we passed through the passage of the hall, there was a Greek figure, I think that of Pericles, with a clamys and helmet, which John Kemble desired me to notice; and it instantly struck me with wonder at the gentlemanlike grace which Art could give to a human form with so simple a vesture. It was not, however, until we reached the grand saloon that the first sight of the god overawed my incredulity. Every step of approach to his presence added to my sensations, and all recollections of his name in classic poetry swarmed on my mind as spontaneously

as the associations that are conjured up by the sweetest music.

The reader, by this time, will probably ask a truce to the account of my own impressions, and require to have those of Mrs. Siddons. Engrossed as I was with the Apollo, I could not forget the honour of being before him in the company of so august a worshipper; and it certainly increased my enjoyment to see the first interview between the paragon of Art and that of Nature. She was evidently much struck, and remained a long time before the statue; but, like a true admirer, was not loquacious. I remember, however, that she said, "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!" When we walked round to other sculptures, I observed that almost every eye in the hall was fixed upon her, and followed her; yet I could perceive that she was not known, as I overheard the spectators say, "Who is she?—Is she not an

Englishwoman?" At this time she was in her fifty-ninth year, and yet her looks were so noble, that she made you proud of English beauty, even in the presence of Grecian sculpture.

The following year gave her a severe shock in the death of her son, Henry. He expired of a consumptive complaint, at the age of forty, while manager of the Edinburgh theatre. Henry Siddons was a sensible judge of dramatic poetry, and, as a player, he had merit in certain parts, as well as universal industry and application. But he was not a great actor. He was by far too sensitive for the vocation, and felt all its rubs and criticisms with too morbid acuteness. His very resemblance to his mother was a misfortune to him, by always challenging invidious comparison.* Mrs. Siddons told me that he was the most unfortunate man in his choice of a profession, but the most judicious and happy in the choice of

* An account of his dramatic and literary works is given in the *Biographia Dramatica*.

a wife. He married Miss Murray, the daughter of the actor. His mother's grief for him is strongly expressed in the following notes to Mrs. Fitz Hugh :

“ *Westbourne* ; 1815.

“ This third shock has indeed sadly shaken me, and, although in the very depths of affliction, I agree with you that consolation may be found, yet the voice of nature will for a time overpower that of reason ; and I cannot but remember ‘ that such things were, and were most dear to me.’

“ I am tolerably well, but have no voice. This is entirely nervousness, and fine weather will bring it back to me. Write to me, and let me receive consolation in a better account of your precious health. My brother and Mrs. Kemble have been very kind and attentive, as indeed they always were in all events of sickness or of sorrow. The little that was left of my poor

sight is almost washed away by tears, so that I fear I write scarce legibly. God's will be done!

"S. S."

"Tuesday, April 7, 1815.

"I don't know why, unless that I am older and feebler, or that I am now without a profession, which forced me out of myself in my former afflictions, but the loss of my poor dear Harry seems to have laid a heavier hand upon my mind than any I have sustained. I drive out to recover my voice and my spirits, and am better while abroad; but I come home and lose them both in an hour. I cannot read or do any thing else but puddle with my clay. I have begun a full-length figure of Cecilia; and this is a resource which fortunately never fails me. Mr. Fitz Hugh approves of it, and that is good encouragement. I have little to complain of, except a low voice and lower spirits.

"Yours,

"S. S."

Before the year 1815 expired, Mrs. Siddons consented to give the family of her deceased son Henry the benefit of her acting for ten nights, in Edinburgh; and she repaired thither, but by slow stages, paying many visits to her friends during the journey. At Kirby Moorside she stopped for several days with Sir Ralph and Lady Noel, and Lady Byron. The effort of acting at Edinburgh, on the stage which brought to her mind so many recollections of her son, was peculiarly painful. A nervous agitation perceptibly affected her on the first night of her appearance, and now and then interrupted her voice; but, after the first scene, she subdued this sensation, and her faculties were displayed in their full power. The ablest theatrical criticism that appeared in Edinburgh respecting her said as follows: "Mrs. Siddons not only is, but looks older than when she was last before us. But in this single observation every thing inauspicious to her efforts is included and exhausted."

The same compliment was paid to her acting in London in 1816, when, at the command of the Princess Charlotte, she re-appeared on the stage for a few nights. Her Royal Highness was unfortunately prevented by illness from enjoying the gratification which she had bespoken; but the general report of public opinion was, that Mrs. Siddons shewed neither abatement of skill nor relaxation of spirit in her acting.*

* During the same year she did me the honour of dining with me, at my house, in Sydenham, and it was to me a memorable day, from the ludicrous, though happily temporary distress that attended it. Mrs. Siddons, much as she loved fame, detested being made a shew of, when she paid visits of mere personal friendship; and, when she promised to dine with Mrs. Campbell and myself, it was on a distinct understanding that she was to meet only our own family. I was particularly anxious to keep my word on this point, and forbore to invite any of my friends, much as many of them would have been gratified by seeing her. About noon there arrived two strangers, American gentlemen. One of them was the brother of Washington Irving, and they both brought me letters of introduction from Sir Walter Scott. I was very happy to see them, but

As Miss Siddons grew up, and required to mix in the world, Mrs. Siddons found her abode at Westbourne rather too retired. She therefore gave it up; and in 1817 took the lease of a house, pleasantly situated, with an adjoining garden and small green, at the top of Upper Baker street, on the right side towards the Regent's Park. Here, as at Westbourne, she built an additional room for her modelling.

felt no small alarm, when, from a servant having come into the room and babbled something about Mrs. Siddons and dinner, my American guests discovered what I wished them not to know. "Ha! Mrs. Siddons," they exclaimed; "then we will stop and dine with you also." "Well, gentlemen," I said, "tomorrow or next day, or any other day in the year, I shall be delighted to receive you hospitably; but really Mrs. Siddons laid her commands upon me, that she should meet no strangers, and I cannot invite you to stop." "Oh, but we can stop," said they, "without invitation. You can get us out, to be sure, by calling in the constable, but, unless you force us away, we will have a sight of the Siddons." And they kept their word. When her carriage approached the house, I went out to

The last time that she appeared on any stage was for the benefit of Charles Kemble, at Covent Garden, on the 9th of June, 1819. The part, I think, was injudiciously chosen : it is long and laborious, it brings the actress almost constantly before the audience, and is not, like *Lady Macbeth* or *Queen Katharine*, equally striking in every scene. Her action in the greater part of the play was thought to be somewhat re-

conduct her over a short pathway on the common, as well as to prepare her for a sight of the strangers. It was the only time, during a friendly acquaintance of so many years, that I ever saw a cloud upon her brow. She received my apology very coldly, and walked into my house with tragic dignity. At first she kept the gentlemen of the New World at a transatlantic distance ; and *they* made the matter worse, as I thought, for a time, by the most extravagant flattery. But my Columbian friends had more address than I supposed, and they told her so many interesting anecdotes about their native stage, and the enthusiasm of their countrymen respecting herself, that she grew frank and agreeable, and shook hands with both of them at parting.

dundant, and to want that grand repose for which she had been so celebrated. In many passages, however, she was still herself:—particularly in the threatening injunction to *Glenalvon* to beware of injuring *Young Norval*, when she uttered the words

“Thou lookst at me as if thou fain wouldst pry
Into my heart—’tis open as my speech;”

and when she swept past him with an indignant wave of her arm.—She was also great in her final exit, when, exclaiming

“For such a son,
And such a husband, drove me to my fate!”

she rushed distractedly from the stage.

The audience shewed their devotion for her :
at the question of *Young Norval*

“But did my sire surpass the rest of men,
As thou excellest all of womankind?”

they applied the words to Mrs. Siddons, by three rounds of applause.

In the July of 1819 his Royal Highness the Prince Regent gave a grand fancy ball, respecting which Mrs. Siddons sent the following good-humoured note to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh:

“*July 12, 1819.*

“Well, my dear friend, though I am not of rank and condition to be myself at the Prince’s ball, my fine clothes, at any rate, will have that honour. Lady B. has borrowed my *Lady Macbeth’s* finest banquet dress, and I wish her ladyship joy in wearing it, for I found the weight of it almost too much for endurance for half an hour. How will she be able to carry it for such a length of time? But young and old, it seems, are expected to appear, upon that ‘high solemnity,’ in splendid and fanciful apparel, and many of these beauties will appear in my stage finery.

“Lady C. at first intended to present herself (as she said very drolly) as a vestal virgin, but

has now decided upon the dress of a fair Circassian. I should like to see this gorgeous assembly, and I have some thoughts of walking in in the last dress of *Lady Macbeth*, and swear I came there in my sleep. But enough of this nonsense. "S. S."

The departure of her brother John, for Switzerland, the air of which country agreed much better than that of London with his declining health, was a severe privation to her, and she consoled her sisterly affection by going to visit him at Lausanne, in 1821. She found him living in a beautiful retirement, near the borders of the Leman Lake.

Miss Siddons writes from thence, in her mother's name, to her friend, Mrs. Fitz Hugh.

"*Lausanne ; July 13, 1821.*

"Here we are, without accident, seated in this most comfortable house, (such another, I

suppose, there is not in the canton,) in the midst of this divine scenery. I do not yet think it real—no more, I believe, does my mother; but she is well, and delighted to see her brother. Both he and Mrs. Kemble seem as perfectly happy as I ever saw two human beings. They received us most kindly. Their situation is a blessed one. The house has been built only five years, and by a person who has been in England, and therefore has some faint notions of comfort. It overlooks the lake, and has fine views in every direction. My mother is dying to see Chamouny, but every one assures her, it would be next to impossible for her, and that the fatigue would prevent her enjoying it. So I believe we are all to make a little tour to Berne.”

The expedition to Chamouny seems to have been given up, for Miss Siddons very soon afterwards writes thus to Miss Wilkinson: “Our tour answered perfectly as far as it went. The

weather at first was beautiful, but it changed, and set in so determinedly for rain, that we cut it short, and came back four days sooner than we intended. It is quite useless to attempt describing the beauties of the scenery. My uncle says, that what we saw is far finer than the tour to Chamouny, which I think we shall not now see, or much regret, having eaten of chamois, crossed a lake, mounted a glacier with two men cutting steps in the ice with a hatchet, and done most of the surprising things that travellers boast of. My mother bore all the fatigues much more wonderfully than any of us."

The widow of Garrick died in 1822, at a venerable age. She made the following bequest to the great actress, in a codicil to her will, dated August 15, 1822 :

"I give to Mrs. Siddons a pair of gloves which were Shakespeare's, and were presented by one of his family to my late dear

husband, during the jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon."

Information of the above reached Mrs. Siddons, with this note from Mrs. Garrick's executors:

"5, *Adelphi Terrace* ;

"Oct. 30, 1822.

"MADAM,

"We beg leave to transmit to you the above extract from a codicil to Mrs. Garrick's will, and to acquaint you that we will have the honour of waiting on you, for the purpose of delivering the relic therein mentioned, whenever you may be so good as to inform us that it may be convenient to you to receive our visit.

"We remain, with much respect,

"Madam,

"Your most obedient humble servants,

"THOS. RACKETT, G. F. BELTZ,

"*Executors.*

"P.S. We beg leave to mention, that on Saturday next we shall be absent from town, and that we shall leave town for a few days on Wednesday next.

"Mrs. Siddons."

After this period, there was a sameness in Mrs. Siddons's life, that furnishes little interesting matter for Biography. She generally spent her winters, with the exception of the Christmas weeks, at her house in Baker street, and gave frequent and large parties, at which, till a year or two before her death, she treated her friends to readings from Shakespeare. During the summer she repaired to some watering place, or divided the months in visiting her particular friends.*

* The friends whom she chiefly visited in the country were the Fitz Hughs, at Bannisters; Mrs. Arkwright, at Stoke, in Derbyshire; Mrs. John Kemble, at Cheltenham; Lady Noel, and Lady Byron; the Marlows, at

In her advanced age, she could not expect to be free from the infirmities that flesh is heir to ; and that complaint, the erysipelas, which ultimately carried her off, frequently attacked her with a burning soreness in her mouth, or with headachs that were equally painful. Yet, till the last year of a long life, she had a hale and cheerful aspect. Time itself seemed to lay his touches upon her reverentially, for she always

St. John's College, Oxford ; the Freres, at Cambridge ; the Blackshaws, at their seat in Berkshire ; Mr. and Mrs. Halsey, at Henley park ; the Elliots, at Hurst ; Lady Barrington, at Bedsfield ; Lord and Lady Darnley, at Cobham ; and Lord and Lady Arran, at Bognor. With the last of these families she became acquainted in consequence of coming one summer to live in their neighbourhood. Her cottage happened to be that which the deceased poet, Hayley, had possessed. The Arrans begged permission to wait upon her the moment they heard of her arrival, and her intimacy with them became so cordial, that she spent seven successive Christmases at their house.

In the intercourse of so popular a person, it is hardly

looked many years younger than her age : her step, her voice, and her eyes, denoted a mind of unchanged tranquillity and intelligence. I find, from her letters, that the deaths of some of her friends affected her strongly, especially those of Mrs. Damer and Mrs. Piozzi ; but it is hardly fair to commemorate as misfortunes those griefs from which none are exempted but the selfish and the callous.

possible to draw an exact line of distinction between mere acquaintance and friendship ; and in the following enumeration I cannot pretend to name all who were the intimate friends of her later years. But the persons whom I saw oftenest at her house during the last fifteen years of her life, besides those whom I have just mentioned, were Mrs. Piozzi ; Sir George and Lady Beaumont ; Lady Charlotte Campbell ; Lord Sidmouth ; Mr. H. Addington ; Lady Harcourt ; Lord and Lady Scarborough ; Countess Clare ; Dr. Batty ; Professor Smyth ; the Rev. Sidney Smith ; Dr. Holland ; the Rev. Dr. Whalley ; the Rev. Mr. Milman ; the Rev. Mr. Harness ; Mr. and Miss Rogers ; Mr. Sharp ; Mrs. Baillie and Joanna Baillie.

The incident that most agreeably excited her in her last years, was the favourable reception of Fanny Kemble on the stage. She went to see her niece's performance, and was moved to tears of joy.

In her seventy-third year she wrote the following letter to Mrs. Fitz Hugh :

*“ Cobham Hall, the Seat of Lord Darnley ;
1827.*

“ I have brought myself to see whether change of scene, and the cordial kindness of my noble host and hostess, will not at least do something to divert my torment. But real evils will not give way to such applications, gratifying though they may be. I have had the honour, however, of conversing with Prince Leopold ; he is a very agreeable and sensible converser, and her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent seems to justify all the opinions of her amiability. I have begun to recover the loss

of my dear little girls, George's daughters. How I long to hear that they are safe in the arms of their anxious parents.

“ In this magnificent place, I assure you, my seventy-second birth-day was celebrated with the most gratifying and flattering cordiality. We had music and Shakespeare, which Lord Darnley has at his fingers' ends. I should have enjoyed the party more if it had not been so large ; but twenty-three people at dinner is rather too much of a good thing. * * * * Talking of the arts, I cannot help thinking with sorrow of the statue of my poor brother. It is an absolute libel on his noble person and air. I should like to pound it into dust, and scatter it to the winds.

“ Yours,

“ S. S.”

The illness that proved fatal attacked her in April, 1831, when she had entered on her

seventy-sixth year. The appearance of the erysipelas on one of her ancles considerably alarmed her medical attendant, Mr. Bushell; but he treated her so judiciously that the symptoms grew more favourable; and before the end of the month she felt so much recovered, that she jocularly told him she was in no need of his visits, for "*she had health to sell.*"

Unfortunately, however, she ventured out soon afterwards, in a carriage, one very bleak day, and the cold appears to have driven in her malady to the vital regions. On the 31st of May she was seized with vomitings and rigors, and in the course of the evening both her legs were attacked with erysipelatous inflammation. This increased during the night, and was accompanied with much fever. In the course of the following day she was seen by Dr. Leman. Her state became hourly more alarming. Gangrenous spots soon made their appearance; and, about nine on the morning

of the 8th of June, she expired, after a week of acute suffering.

Her funeral took place on the 15th of June. Soon after ten in the morning the procession began to move from Upper Baker street to the place of interment, the New Ground of Paddington church, in this order:

Feathers.

Hearse and four Horses.

Two Mourning Coaches with four Horses.

In the first Mr. Charles Kemble }
Mr. Horace Twiss } her Executors.

Two Sons of Mrs. Henry Siddons.

In the second Mr. Meyrick, Executor.

Mr. Stirling

Mr. Bushell

Dr. Leman } her Medical Attendants.

Mrs. Siddons's private Carriage.

Mr. C. Kemble's ditto.

Then followed eleven mourning coaches, with the performers of the Theatres Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden. They arrived at

the church about half-past eleven, when the service was read in the most impressive manner by the Rev. Mr. Campbell. There were supposed to be at least 5000 persons present, many of whom were seen to shed tears. A young woman, who came veiled, and whose name was never discovered, knelt beside the coffin, with demonstrations of the strongest grief. The grave bears this simple inscription :

SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF
SARAH SIDDONS,
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE JUNE 8, 1831,
IN HER 76TH YEAR.

“ BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHO DIE IN THE LORD.”*

The English, on all subjects excepting politics, have a reservedness of speech, and a dislike to

* In the inside of Paddington Church there is a marble slab to her memory, near the Altar, with the subjoined text: “ *I know that my Redeemer liveth.*”

the display of enthusiasm, that often makes them appear more indifferent to interesting events than they really are. Among the French, the obsequies of so illustrious a person would have drawn forth bursts of expression from the whole national heart, and they would have commanded her relics to be interred in the Pantheon. The British public gave no such vivid tokens of their regard for Mrs. Siddons; but her death was every where mentioned with strong and just recollections of her unrivalled glory as an actress, and her unquestioned private worth: and I am far from imagining that the sensation of regret was not general, though unostentatiously expressed. Many years as she had been retired from the stage, it could not be forgotten how long she had been its peerless pride; and that the dignified decorum of her life had added to the respectability of her profession. It was her own wish that she should be interred with the plainest simplicity; and, I know not how it is, but so it

is, that I visit her suburban grave with calmer sensations of melancholy pleasure than if I had to approach it in Westminster Abbey,

“Through rows of warriors, and through ranks of kings.”*

In speaking of her as an actress, my predominant sensation, whilst writing her Life, has been a consciousness of my incompetence to do her justice. Her lofty beauty, her graceful walk and gesture, and her potent elocution, were endowments which at the first sight marked her supremacy on the stage. But it was not the classical propriety of a speech, nor the grandeur or pathos of a scene,—it was no individual or insulated beauty, that we exclusively admired. These received their full portion of applause, and to many individuals might seem to exhaust the theme of her praise. But it was the high judgment which watched over all these qualifications, the equally vigilant

* Tickell's Monody on the Death of Addison.

sympathy which threw itself into the assumed character,—it was her sustained understanding of her part, her self-devotion to it, and her abstraction from every thing else, and no casual bursts of effect, that rivetted the experienced spectator's admiration.

The greatest pleader of his age, Erskine, said that her performance was a school for orators,—that he had studied her cadences and intonation, and that to the harmony of her periods and pronunciation he was indebted for "*his best displays.*"*

In hearing the magical musician Neukomme perform on the organ, he seemed to me to enlarge its diapason. Mrs. Siddons, on the stage, had a similar power to magnify one's conception of the heart's capacity for tender, intense, and lofty feelings. It was not enough

* This declaration of Erskine was told me by Mr. Jekyll.

to say of her acting, that it was a true and perfect picture of a human being in pathetic or terrific situations, for she seemed more than a human being ; her commanding intelligence seemed to bring her audience before *her*, and *not her* before her audience. The roll and radiance of her eye, the depth of her pathos, and the majesty of her scorn, made you feel as if you were witnessing some godlike soul from the heroic world pouring forth its sensibility.

My friend, Mr. Young the actor, says to me, in a letter respecting her: "I look back to those periods during which I had the good fortune to act with her as the happiest of my professional recollections. She was the most lofty-minded actress I ever beheld. Whatever she touched she ennobled. She never sought by unworthy means to entrap her audience. She disdained to apply to any of the petty resources of trickish minds, in order to startle and surprise her hearers. There was no habi-

tual abruptness, no harshness about her. You never caught her slumbering through some scenes, in order to produce, by contrast, an exaggerated effect in others. She neglected nothing. From the first moment to the last, she was, according to theatric parlance, '*in the character.*' The spectator was always carried along with her ;—'*wept when she wept, smiled when she smiled, and each emotion of her heart became in turn his own.*' There were no pauses protracted till they became unintelligible. What was passing in her mind was read in her changing countenance. Each character became, in her changing mind, a perfect picture, in which, through all the changes of passion, a harmony was perceived."

Mrs. Siddons had a moderate talent for versification. I am not aware that the following lines, which were the production of her pen, were ever published.

LINES.

SAY, what's the brightest wreath of fame,
But canker'd buds, that opening close ;
Ah! what the world's most pleasing dream,
But broken fragments of repose ?

Lead me where Peace with steady hand
The mingled cup of life shall hold,
Where Time shall smoothly pour his sand,
And Wisdom turn that sand to gold.

Then haply at Religion's shrine
This weary heart its load shall lay,
Each *wish* my fatal love resign,
And passion melt in tears away.

In her personal character, she united high dignity of principle and self-respect with a quiet, pacific, and kindly temper. Those who knew her intimately may be so accustomed to think the benignity of her disposition a part of her character to be taken for granted, that they will possibly wonder at my anxiety in insisting on it. But, small is the number of such persons compared with the multitude of those who knew her but slightly ; and there were

some peculiarities in her mind and demeanour that tended to mislead superficial observers. Her gravity of manner, which was partly a family peculiarity, and partly the result of a thoughtful temper and strong religious impressions, made her appear the reverse of that social and pleasant being which she really was ; for her hospitality as a hostess, and her agreeableness in a small circle of old acquaintances, could not be surpassed. But in mixed society she was only tacitly and passively the ornament of a party. Conscious of great fame, she had no hectic ambition for little popularity, and no powers for brilliancy in mixed conversation. Her understanding was very solid, and its deliberate conclusions were so sure, that in some of the most anxious moments of my life I have been thankful for her salutary counsel ; yet, both her judgment and fancy were slow and indolent, so that they were little adapted for small talk and common-place subjects. She was proud, in the best sense of the word ; but I believe it was

c c

not pride that created her reserve so much as diffidence in her own colloquial readiness.

In addition to the gravity that was natural to her, she had a coldness of manner on slight acquaintance, habitually acquired by the consciousness of her vocation. She felt that her profession would have exposed her both to the insolence and familiarity of patronage, if she had not possessed a great degree of defensive dignity. I do not say that she attained the very point of perfection, in assuming no more loftiness, at any time, than was absolutely required ; but, I am as sure as half a life of observation can make me, that she meant her dignity to be purely defensive, and never arrogant. She had too elevated a mind to give intentionally to any human creature a particle of superfluous pain.*

* From a letter with which I was favoured by Mr. Welsh, the musical composer, who had the honour of

As evidences of the mistakes that were made with regard to the subordinate traits of her personal character, (for its sum total stood above reproach,) I venture to quote some few circumstances of my own observation, which, as they are minute, may be carped at by illiberal criticism as too insignificant for a place in her Biography. But I beg more candid judgments to recollect how frequently our truest estimates

Mrs. Siddons's particular friendship, I make the following quotation, in allusion to her benevolence:

"It has been said that Mrs. Siddons was not generous; to the contrary I can bear witness, and have pleasure in stating, that, at the time George III. was too unwell to sign death-warrants, a friend of mine interested himself greatly in behalf of three poor men, Ramsgate pilots, who lingered under sentence of death fourteen months in Newgate, expecting that the following Monday would terminate their existence. They had large families, to whom we had the happiness ultimately to send the sufferers back, cleared of every suspicion of guilt. During their confinement, Mrs. Siddons, in order to relieve the wants of their families, commissioned me to convey to them very considerable sums of money, but

of human nature are drawn from trifling incidents; and really, if the novelist, in portraying some woman that never existed but in his own imagination, can interest us by minute details, it is hard if one may not hazard them, in the life of an actual and illustrious being.

I had once by chance the honour of seeing Mrs. Siddons and the Duke of Wellington in

not to publish to the world the extent of her donations. If her mind was not susceptible, and her heart cold, then her acting in private life far surpassed even her efforts on the stage; for, on hearing that they were saved and sent home to their families, the mixture of her smiles and tears exhibited that which I conceived the most amiable feelings that could animate a human heart. The respect which all classes of society shewed to Mrs. Siddons caused them to observe a distance, which was her greatest annoyance; it prevented her enjoying society in general, and kept down her natural flow of spirits. But, to the few who knew her as I did, she was gay, and perfectly without ostentation,—kind, and full of anecdote; and such a creature as, I fear, we shall never see again."

the same party, at Paris. They were observed, after a first mutual recognizance, to stand by each other without conversing. I overheard a group of English people angrily remark, "What a proud woman is that Mrs. Siddons: she will not condescend to speak even to Wellington!" Now I had seen the Duke, two evenings before, meet the great actress, and he addressed her with peculiar courtesy and graciousness. On this latter occasion I put no bad construction on his taciturnity. His Grace was most likely as deficient in small talk as the great actress. But still less did I blame Mrs. Siddons's silence; on the contrary, I regarded it as a trait of her true character. Her reserve in mixed company was independent and equal; and she behaved to the Duke of Wellington exactly as she would have done to any other person slightly acquainted with her, for she had no extra courtesy for rank.

She had very little light conversation in

mixed company for any body, but, when her heart was interested, she was very condescending, and would exert herself to please. She doated upon children. Some time after I had seen her in Paris, I visited her, with my son in my hand, who was then about six years old. I had to leave him with her for about an hour, and in my absence I had some misgivings that it was unfair to have taxed her with the company of so young a visitant. But, when I came back, I found the little fellow's face lighted up in earnest conversation with her. She had been amusing him with stories adapted to his capacity, and bestowed attentions on a child which she had refused to a conqueror.

It would be absurd in me to affect for the loss of this noble woman any thing like the grief of those friends who were her chief mourners, and who felt their consanguinity to her by the bleeding of their hearts. But I feel that my heart regrets and honours her with all

its sincerity. Nor is it inconsistent with my serious reverence for her memory, that her image throws a sunshine on my imagination which excites it to cheerfulness. The most flattering delight that a friend could have in Mrs. Siddons's company was to see her smiles and hear her laugh. Hence my memory naturally reverts to her cheerful moments; and, as I cannot bear to think of her gloomily, I have not written her life lachrymosely. She herself could not blame me for intermixing my recollections of her memory with cheerful anecdotes. Is it not better to honour our dead friends by flowers upon their tombs than by the gloomiest sepulture?

Mrs. Siddons was a great, simple being, who was not shrewd in her knowledge of the world, and was not herself well understood, in some particulars, by the majority of the world. The universal feeling towards her was respectful, but she was thought austere. Now, with all

her apparent haughtiness, there was no person more humble when humility morally became her. I have known her call up a servant whom she found she had undeservedly blamed, and beg his pardon before her family. She had a motherly affectionate heart. Hundreds of her letters have been submitted to me; and, though her Correspondence has disappointed me, in being less available than I could have wished for quotation, yet, in one respect, it delighted me, by the proofs which it gave of her endearing domestic character. In not one of her notes, though some of them were written on subjects of petty vexation, is there a single trace of angry feeling.

From intense devotion to her profession she derived a peculiarity of manner, of which I have the fullest belief she was not in the least conscious, unless reminded of it;—I mean the habit of attaching dramatic tones and emphasis to common-place colloquial subjects.

She went, for instance, one day, into a shop at Bath, and, after bargaining for some calico, and hearing the mercer pour forth an hundred commendations of the cloth, she put the question to him, "*But will it wash?*" in a manner so electrifying as to make the poor shopman start back from his counter. I once told her this anecdote about herself, and she laughed at it heartily, saying, "Witness truth, I never meant to be tragical." This singularity made her manner susceptible of caricature. I know not what others felt, but I own that I loved her all the better for this unconscious solemnity of manner; for, independently of its being blended with habitual kindness to her friends, and giving, odd as it may seem, a zest to the humour of her familiar conversation, it always struck me as a token of her simplicity. In point of fact, a manner in itself artificial, sprung out of the *naïveté* of her character.

In the course of a long life, how few individuals have diffused so much delight and moral sympathy ! When a foreigner came to London, during her reign on the stage, and demanded to see all that England could boast of, could you have done justice to your country, without shewing him the Siddons, as one of the ornaments of our empire ? And she was more than a woman of genius ; for the additional benevolence of her heart made her an honour to her sex and to human nature.

FINIS.

**HOME USE
CIRCULATION DEPARTMENT
MAIN LIBRARY**

This book is due on the last date stamped below.
1-month loans may be renewed by calling 642-3405.
6-month loans may be recharged by bringing books
to Circulation Desk.

Renewals and recharges may be made 4 days prior
to due date.

**ALL BOOKS ARE SUBJECT TO RECALL 7 DAYS
AFTER DATE CHECKED OUT.**

FEB 1 1975 0 0

REC'D CIRC DEPT NOV 23 '75

APR 6 1976

REC. CIR. OCT 20 '75

DEC 04 2006

REC. CIR. OCT 8 '76

REC. CIR. SEP 9 '80

REC. CIR. APR

9 1979

JAN 07 1981

JAN 11 2000

LD21-A-40m-5,'74
(R8191L)

General Library
University of California
Berkeley

YC104080

708570

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

